

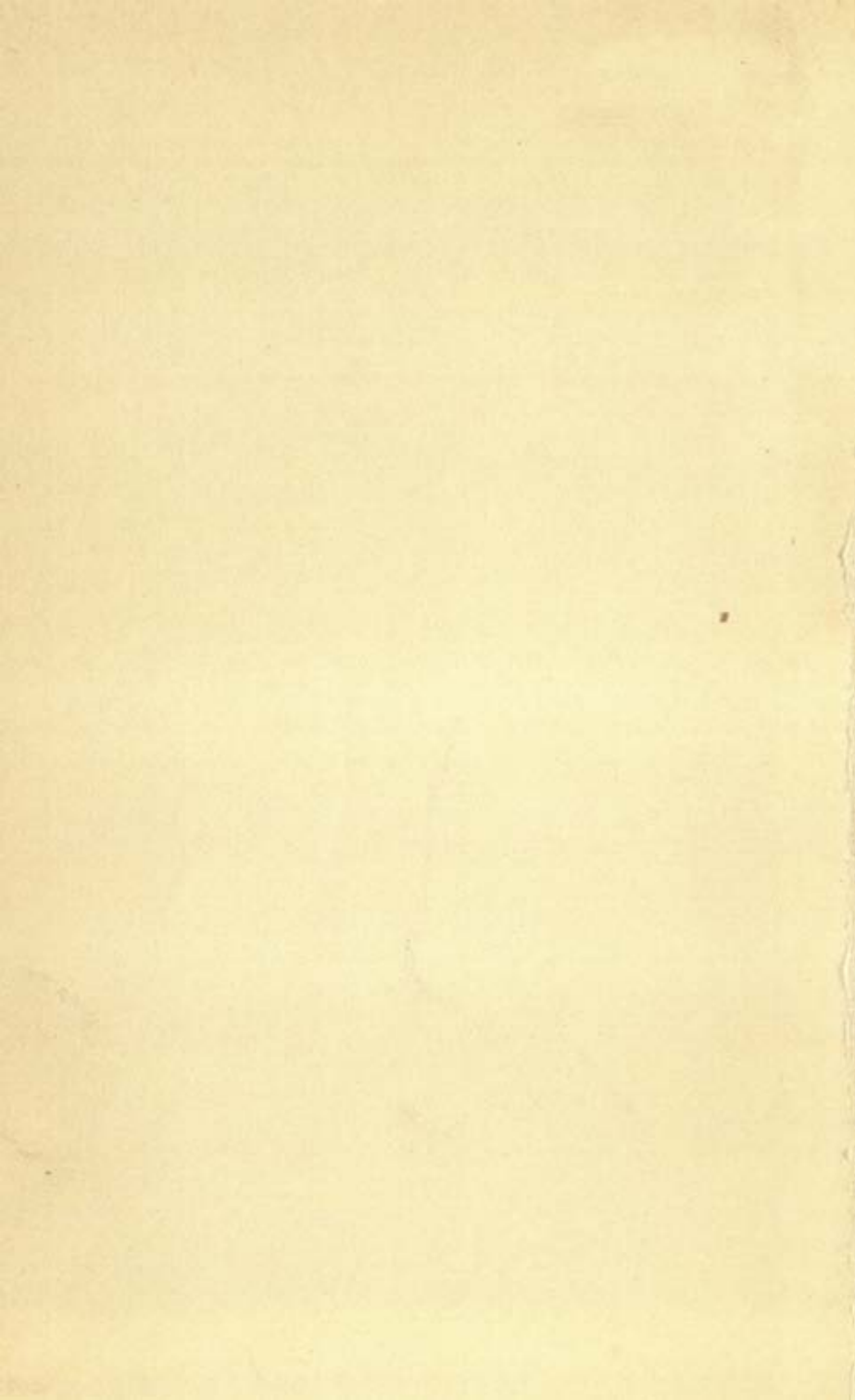
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TALES FROM THE ABORIGINES

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BRIMMING BILLABONGS

SONGS OF THE SONGMAN (*with Professor Elkin*)

LIFE AMONG THE ABORIGINES

CONTENT TO LIE IN THE SUN

# TALES FROM THE ABORIGINES

by

W. E. (BILL) HARNEY

27773

ILLUSTRATED

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Har



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THE LOCKWOODS OF DARWIN, N.T.  
RECEIVED FROM MRS. H. LOCKWOOD  
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I heard them chanting by the camp-fire's blaze  
    'Neath banyan trees.

They told me stories where the she-oak sways  
    To the desert's breeze.

How the Dog-maids snarled as they raced to slay;  
And the Lightning-men turned night to day,  
As Frog-men changed to hills, when they  
    Chanted the Rain-men's song.

How the puberty-maid was afraid, and danced  
    To the rainbow's sway.

Where Wulgaru capered, roared and pranced  
    To scare away

The tribal mothers who gathered seeds  
From mulga trees, the grass and reeds,  
And grinding these for their daily needs  
Spun yarns as old as time.



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### *Acknowledgments*

Illustrations nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 are reproduced from photographs supplied by the Australian News and Information Bureau; the remaining illustrations were supplied by the author.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

BY CAMP-FIRE after the day's hunt, or during the heat of the day when the foods gathered from the bush or sea were cooked in the ground-ovens or on the coals of the open fire, the aboriginal people loved to weave into their daily life the stories of bygone days.

Experts in the oral tradition, their song-men and story-tellers kept alive the past as they told their stories of fact and fantasy. Happy was the clan who had a good story-teller, and peaceful the white person who, when working the aborigines, had one of the song-men to keep his workers contented after the hard work of the day. A quiet camp was something to worry over, but when the tales went round amidst loud laughter, the white boss of the cattle station and elsewhere could rest at ease.

Down through the ages the story-tellers of all races have kept alive the traditions of their country, and living, as I have been, with the aborigines over the years, I too have listened, marvelled and laughed over their stories. Some of these I now pass on.

Some of their stories are woven around old-time myths, others are tales of adventure similar to our own. In reading them one may discern a glimmering of the folk-tales from other lands. Whether they have arisen by independent thought or are due to contact when the human race was young, is for the student of anthropology to decide.

Many aborigines have recounted these tales to me and in the retelling of them I have woven the camp-life and customs of the story-tellers into the tales. As an end piece to some stories I have put in some verse to explain—in their quaint way of expressing our English—many of their observations about our way of life.

In gathering these tales I experienced many pleasures and happy days amidst a very intelligent people, and I now take this opportunity of thanking them for the stories they so willingly narrated to me around the camp-fires in the Northern Territory of Australia.

W. E. HARNEY

Alice Springs,  
Northern Territory,  
Australia



## INTRODUCTION

**E**IGHTY YEARS of contact between Europeans and aborigines in the Northern Territory of Australia has split the social structure of the whites into moieties as fixed as they were in aboriginal society.

On one side were the 'too-white-ones', an aboriginal term describing the conventional types who lived in the 'big-fellow-house', and the 'rubbish-ones', who were the workers attached to the 'Big-fellows'. The top moiety regarded the 'blacks' as slaves, the lower ones called them the 'old-folk'. Everyone called them Blackfellows.

Nowadays welfare societies call the aborigines 'wards', 'coloured-folk', 'dark-people', etc., in an effort to stop calling them 'black'—a colour in the eyes of many people that denotes something unclean and evil. Strange, but the fact remains.

The aborigines of these tales are really a very dark-brown people, but I write of them as black people, for that is what they call themselves. Calling themselves 'blackfellows' they call us 'whitefellows', yet they can see that we are every shade of white from pink to brown.

The term 'white' as opposed to 'black' is more than colour, it is a clash of opinions and ideas. On one hand the whites struggling to get places, the blacks just drifting along. To one comes worry and all the sickness that arises from fast thinking and living. To the other a life based on tradition going back to before the advent of civilization.

With contact came a changed environment and in it the aborigines became 'strong-fellow-face' in the presence of the 'too-white-ones' and their learned friends who came to study the black people and who found them stern dour people ever shrouded in secret mysticism and taboo rituals. But to the white toilers, in the lower levels of their society, who had always rubbed shoulders with the native men and women, the aborigines were a laughing carefree people full of humour and a curious custom, in that they were only too happy to share their female companions with their friends. Out of these two contacts arose different lines of thought that prevailed in an ever-changing society that slowly weaned the aborigines away from their hunting grounds and tribal customs.

On one hand the native woman, only too eager to be away from the strict taboos of ancient ritual, mixed freely with the men who lived in a white-womanless society and, being natural hunters, they supplemented their white friend's meagre rations of flour, sugar, tea

and meat with the rich fresh bush-foods they gathered each day from their tribal areas.

The white bushmen, on the other side of the picture, were only too eager to accept the welcome change. In a land of hard conditions and poor wages, the 'too-white-ones' looked upon the native girls as a form of amenity which would hold the workers to their jobs, and the cook on a cattle station who controlled the foodstuffs was looked upon by the aborigines as a bigger boss than the manager. Only one person preceded him in the order of importance and that man was the station storekeeper, who carried the key to the head-station store.

In the early days the native girls travelled around with their white companions, and being excellent cattle- and horse-women they became the ones who helped the early settlers to open up the land. They were classed as 'Rubbish-one-whites', 'Comboes', 'clay-pan squatters' and 'poddy-dodgers', but as their status improved and they became owners of 'big herds and fat cheques' their place in society altered. In time they came to be regarded as authorities in matters pertaining to the aborigines.

As I was only a cattle- and boat-man during my early years in the Northern Territory and always interested in the aborigines, I was naturally placed in Combo society, and when I married a coloured girl at Groote Eylandt in 1927, my position—from the 'too-white-ones' point of view—was assured. When in 1940 I joined the Native Affairs Branch (now Welfare) as a protector of aborigines, the upper crust of whites did not take too kindly to the rapid change, and I never ceased to be amazed that the ones who were loudest in condemning both the blacks and myself were those who were not too white themselves. At that time the term 'Combo' was attached by these people to those who were sympathetic to the aborigines.

My work with the Native Affairs Branch gave me a wonderful insight into human nature—both black and white—but I soon discovered that my altered status caused me to be greeted by my aborigine friends with stern visages and suspecting minds. I was now a 'different-kind' like 'little-bit-policeman'.

But on my many patrols around the Northern Territory I listened to the old-time stories in their natural environment and fortunate I was to live with them continually for over forty years. During that period I never wearied of sitting by their camp-fires, watching them prepare their strange meals, and listening to the humour and insight of their stories.

In writing these tales I have endeavoured to keep to the incidents which led up to the telling of them. I have retold the stories in a simple form as they were told to me, explaining some part in that

quaint broken aborigine English, in an endeavour to imprint a picture on the mind of the hearer. 'Picture that thing' is an aborigine's saying for recalling something, and out of that saying are these tales retold.

To write this book in each aborigine's tongue would be an impossibility. This is no scientific work but a gathering of stories in the natural setting in which they were told to me. Here and there a myth fragment has crept in as a part of the tale. My only regret is that I have gathered so few of these from the old 'song-men' or storytellers who are slowly passing away before the advance of radio and movies, which must surely in the end displace them altogether.



LANGUAGE OF THE STORIES

TO TELL the stories of the aborigines one must explain the people and their language. The tales they repeat around their camp-fires have arisen from their imaginations out of a confined environment. Some of the tales are told by many tribes over a wide area of the Northern Territory, and each group has added something to the story that was of special interest to its hearers, and only by living among many tribes can one obtain a fairly complete account of a tale. It would be impossible to know all the fifty-two languages in the Northern Territory, and one must leave to the expert on any one tongue the achievement of arriving at a fuller understanding of a particular tribe.

To gather these stories I went to those aborigines who understood both English and their own tongue and who were, by their initiation and knowledge of ritual, experts in the story-telling art. With this medium of translation I have gathered the tales in their natural environment. In this approach the anthropologist may say that I am wrong, but I have always found that the aborigines are expert translators in their own right and rarely think much of the achievement of a white person who has mastered their tongue.

The aborigines on an island mission station once used this knowledge of their language on the part of a missionary friend of mine, to ask me—in perfect English—for his removal from the mission. When he and I enquired the grounds for this request they gave me the following reasons: (1) he claimed to be clever because he knew their language, yet the smallest native child could talk as well as he; (2) that his knowledge of the language gave them no privacy in their camp-life because if they happened to raise their voices in anger he could hear what they said and could use their accusations against each other for future reference.

To me the accusations against the missionary seemed very humorous, but to the mission aborigines it was a serious affair, made more so when a woman had shouted in anger at her husband about an incident relating to the killing of mission cattle and the subsequent apprehending of the culprit.

In talking to the aborigines in their own language I have often

reverted to English to get a suitable word to express my meaning, and should a group of native people from different tribes come together they will either use sign-talk of a *lingua franca* common to the area. Before the advent of English people the common language of Arnhem-land was the trade jargon of the Macassan trepangers, but today the common inter-tribal language is the quaint broken English that is full of euphony and expression.

With the mission children on the Roper river the exclamation 'nge' could mean anything from 'amazement', 'surprise', 'incredibility' to 'finality', according to the inflection of the speaker's voice, and it was this 'song-rhythm' that emphasized the story which would send the hearers into fits of laughter.

An aboriginal's description of a day's hunting and an incident connected with it would be, as I have often heard it told and acted, described as follows: 'We been go . . . we been go . . . we been go . . . ah!' Now comes some finger-talk to the hearers that he has seen a bees' nest in a tall tree, and a final wave of the hand to signify 'nothing' with an explanation, 'only plenty wasp longa tree'. Again comes the brief description of walking, then another lot of finger-talk. This time the finger-talk is about a kangaroo's track he has seen upon the ground, with some added signs to denote that it was eating grass as it went along, then . . . 'I been look . . . I been look . . . I been look'; now comes a long-drawn-out whisper, 'I . . . been . . . sneak up . . . slow-fellow'; now he gives a sign as one would throw a spear followed by a shout of excitement and hurried speech, 'I been hit-em . . . I been run . . . run . . . run no more little-bit, I been kill em dead'; now comes silence to be broken with the final words of, 'we been cook that kangaroo, him fat . . . no-more-little-bit'.

Thus do stories arise out of simple incidents throughout the day's work. An aboriginal called Billarra was watching me scrape the burnt crust from a damper which I had just taken from the ashes of our camp-fire in which we had cooked them. As I threw the burnt pieces away he remarked, 'Suppose blackfellow do that longa Moon-face'—the nick-name of a particular cattleman in our area—'him go mad, no-more-little-bit. One time my brother been cook damper for him and it been burn, so my brother cut burnt part off all-a-same you,' he explained. 'My brother been scratch em that damper and no more listen and when that Moon-face been look . . . holy goodness!! him been get proper mad and crack stock-whip proper hard-fellow longa that cook backbone. Bang!!, and talk-about fright, that cook been sing out and jump off backside like wallaby from gun. My brother been chuck that damper like all-a-same nothing and him and Moon-face been foot-race for bush, but

my brother been win easy. We like laugh,' he concluded, 'but that Moon-face too cheeky, proper funny one that story.'

Of course the story depended on the picture it gave to the hearers, the justness or unjustness of the incident was as nothing to the story.

A native stockman told me how he and a head-stockman on a cattle station had a quarrel over 'Camp-draft business'.

'That Pumpion-head [the head-stockman's nickname] been gallop at me with big camp-horse and he got whip handle to belt me longa head. . . . I been sit longa my horse and when him close up I been jump down on ground and hit him right longa forehead with big lump of soft antbed that I been grab longa ground. . . . That Pumpion-head been sing out no-more-little-bit as him fall down from horse like "goona" from bullock backside . . . then when him fall, I been mountem my horse and gallop bush easy feller.'

Knowing the locality and the head-stockman he was talking about, I could just imagine this David of the cattle camp awaiting the charging wrath of the 'Big-fellow boss' who rode, he thought, to an easy victory, and then the great bully fell with a plomp on to the dust, to roar with pain and deflated ego as he rubbed the blood, sweat and red earth from his grimy face.

The aborigines have a quaint humour that is best in adversity. An old person falling from a tree and making the dust fly as he hit the earth is a standard joke when a laugh is required, and they somehow have that strange but common characteristic of repeating a good story until it becomes boring to the listeners. Theirs is the story of action, and never have I had to listen to a long, detailed tale that was crammed with intricate but redundant detail.

Once my mate Horace was pulling hard on the halyard of our sailing-vessel which was anchored in the Macarthur River. But the halyard broke on the final heave and overboard he went into the stream. Everyone of the crew was concerned until he arose to the surface, draped with the green water-grass that grew in the depths, and as he blew out a great stream of water from his mouth we all burst into wild laughter at the sight. Not so Horace, who sarcastically wanted to know 'what it was all about', and amid more laughter a native crew man explained that, 'Must laugh at that proper funny thing . . . suppose no laugh then not right longa head.'

Each daily incident is stored away in the mind of the aboriginal and retold that night beside the camp-fires, and tales, such as the one about 'Salt-water Kitty of Borroloola', even passed into a corroboree that was chanted and mimed for years afterwards. A native woman explained to me the story as I watched the dancers mime the tale.

'That poor old Kubidje [blind person],' she told me, 'all day . . .

night . . . talk-talk about her number-one son Piero, who all day bring her up cooked rib-bones from butcher shop in town. Him always cook them proper nice way,' she explained, 'that meat on bones sweet one and make everybody mouth chuck spit [salivate] when they smell em. One day him been bring up big mob bone, and as him put them longa clean paper-bark longside that old woman he tell her eat em up quick fellow way because they were too good. But that silly Kubidje can't listen to her son,' she further explained, 'so when him go away she knock-up our ear-holes with plenty yarns about her good fellow son, and as she talk-talk some children been sneak-up and steal-em all-about bones one-time and they race away and eat em up one shot. . . . My word,' she laughingly concluded, 'when that Kubidje been finish talk-talk and feel about for bones . . . nothing . . . my goodness . . . she been belt em ground longa stick and swear all-about we properly way.'

The humour of the stories was not of how the poor old blind woman was robbed of her bones or the stock-whip down the backbone of the unsuspecting native cook, but the changing scene from one of peacefulness to that of action and fury.

So in the telling of these tales I have tried to 'picture the scene' as the aborigines do when they recount the story. To give atmosphere I have placed them in the original setting and emphasized the major points by letting the storytellers give it in their own style, just as they would do when remembering and recording it to the stranger in their midst.

The anthropologist may say that this is not the scientific approach, but to tell the tale I must give it in the way I and others of the Northern Territory have heard it beside the camp-fires of the tribespeople.

## THE STORY-TELLERS

**T**HE BIG Donkey-camp water-hole in the Katherine River was covered with the pale yellow blooms that had fallen on to its dark green surface from the paper-bark trees along its bank.

Sitting on a large limb that stretched out over the water I was doing a spot of fishing and taking life easy as I watched the dark forms of people sitting beside small camp-fires beneath some shady demallang-gum-trees that shone white against the green fronds of the prickly pandanus trees. From their broken English I knew them to be an admixture of aborigines that had drifted in from the surrounding tribes. Now and then I would hear a burst of native language as one of them spoke to a member of his own tribe, but overall they were the drifters in from bushlands who had come to work for the 'white-fellow-man' who lived in the Katherine township about nine miles down the stream.

From where I fished I could see the sandstone hills beyond the big Donkey-camp water-hole, and knew it to be the gorge-place of the river as it flowed towards us from distant Arnhem land. Its origin, according to native tradition, came about when a mighty rainbow-serpent made this valley and its streams as it came into this land in the Dreamtime, and now along its shady banks the people sat in the pleasant shades to fish and have their 'properly good holidays'.

From a patch of shady sand on the river's bank, an old black man called Baramundi was busy at his trade of catching the fish he was called after. He had already caught a small archer-fish on his smaller cotton line by the simple method of dangling an insect above the surface till the fish squirted a jet of water at it. And now the small fish was on his heavy line in the middle of the stream and the wily old hunter was sitting back and waiting results. Watching him there in indolent ease I could only think of the enraged white-person who was once seeking some native labour. All he could see was 'The useless animals sitting under the trees doing nothing', he told me as he got on with the work himself.

Baramundi was chanting a low tune to himself as he watched his fishing line that became soon a tight hissing cord amidst a swirl of water; and as he hauled the silvery flapping delicacy on to the bank

beside him a babble of excited instructions and childish laughter came from the bushes around him. Looking upon the scene a young aborigine beside me remarked as we watched the old man prepare his catch for cooking on the coals of a fire beside him, 'Old Baramundi proper clever for fish . . . too clever . . . beat every-one nother one blackfellow'. Then switches his tale and pointed to the paper-bark blooms upon the surface of the water and remarks, 'In my country when blackfellow see plenty this one longa water they go to the end of the water-hole to where the wind has blown mob flower . . . that flower make water all-a-same poison and fish must come longa top for wind . . . him just like all-a-same dead and we pick up big mob easy-fellow . . . plenty tuckout . . . everybody happy'.

As a botanist friend of mine had already explained to me how certain leaves, roots and flowers in water-holes will give out a viscid juice that clogs up the fishes' gills and prevents them from getting sufficient air, I nodded assent and he continued. . .

'Baramundi fish come up this river from salt-water-side . . . that one Manbuloo river pigeon all day sing-out, "Come on . . . come on . . . come on" and straight away that fish hear that cry and follow that bird up river.' Seeing my interest he continued, 'Now when us blackfellow hear that manbuloo pigeon sing out we too go to river fish-trap longa stone-bars and we sit down longa shady tree to let fish catchem meself. . . '

'How him catch meself?' I asked in his quaint English and he replied, 'That easy . . . fish trap made from long time by old-time blackfellow . . . that cunning mob been chuck plenty loose stone in river channel, then in middle they been make fast stream all-a-same cattle-race in stock-yard . . . one end deep and 'nother end shallow one where water go under stone . . . fish come now. . . poor thing, and think meself, "Ah!! this narrow creek longa stone right way to get through" and in him go longa rushing water . . . deep first time but soon shallow water then nothing where water go under stone . . . that fish can't go back now for stone wall too close, so him jump to get water place longa 'nother side and him land on stone place and make big noise when him jump-about . . . From shady place old people hear and send kiddie down to bring it up and so we cook it longa fire . . . Plenty sleep,' he added, 'and full up tucker . . . blackfellow too clever, everything right by blackfellow law . . . manbuloo pigeon call . . . fish come and then we all-about go for big tuckout . . . man boss for everything . . . proper greedy one.'

'One more, more greedy,' I replied, 'crocodile eat man and women.'

'Crocodile can't eat women, only keep her for sweetheart-

business, and that woman lay plenty egg all a same fowl and that egg hatch out plenty rainbow snake.'

'Who tell you that yarn?' I questioned and he replied, 'Old people tell we that true one story. One time. . .'

'What about man?' I interrupted. 'Crocodile can eat man?'

'Crocodile only eat man when some doctor-blackfellow sing magic song into that crocodile and make it go and eat him bad friend . . . not crocodile fault, him only do what boss doctor-blackfellow tell him to do. One time . . .'

A hail from Baramundi's camp-fire called us over to where the fat fish was grilling on the coals, and sitting down at his invitation I looked upon that scene of primitive man.

Quite a few aborigines were about at the time of my visit and each one had collected something towards the midday meal. An old one-time desert woman called Bluetongue had brought up from her white boss in town a loaf of bread, and this she put on to an improvised table of green bushes laid upon the earth. Another native called Left-hand had a little tea which he carried about in a small calico bag. A cooked kangaroo was the tribute from a bush hunter who was—so Bluetongue explained—a 'proper myall one . . . no savee white-man food but only blackfellow tucker that he hunt up long bush.'

Everybody was in a holiday spirit and eating and drinking tea they kept up a continual run of stories about incidents of past days, the subjects ranging from the supernatural to hunting and humour. Many were about 'sweetheart-business'. Nothing was vulgar yet they were full of sex meaning, about the youth of the tribes who were always giving the Elders a 'trick', a term which meant without tribal authority and against custom.

Left-hand was on a story of how a 'Devil-devil all-a-same man been follow em me . . . I been spear him and when I go look-look that no more Devil-devil but big fellow kangaroo . . . me been fright, no-more-little-bit.'

Listening to the chatter which always followed a tale, an old native called Barney Jungala whispered in my ear as a sort of plug for the story-teller, 'That Left-hand right man for story.' Further explanations revealed that Left-hand had received his story-telling abilities from the shade-spirit of a one-time renowned story-teller on whose grave he had inadvertently slept. By doing this the deceased orator's gift of stories had passed on to him together with the gift of occultism and the ability to recount tales that were 'Easy longa earhole.'

One young lustful-looking native girl, who was busy eating a piece of kangaroo in lieu of some baramundi (this fish was taboo to the

youth of the tribe owing to its poisonous qualities, which were, however, innocuous to the experienced Elders), was recounting a story with much laughter of how 'two white cattle-men been fight longa me all-a-same-scrub-bull . . . they been kick up dirt and catch em my arm, one fellow one side 'nother one 'nother side and scratch-pull with me all-a-same rope. . . . I been sing out no-more-little-bit and they been let go and fight longa finger. . . . I been dead-laugh . . . too funny. Big cattle-boss been come out when him hear noise and chase em two fellow from place and I been sleep longa that one 'cause him too strong for all-about.'

An old woman called 'Jenny Middle-night' from her roving activities when plying her profession, told of an exploit in her youth. 'When I been young girl and all about man been chase me . . . can't finish. Well this one blackboy,' she told us, 'him been like me too-much, and one proper rainy night him try sneak in to big bush humpy (house) where we mob countrymen slept. Too dark inside for that Brownie, so him climb all-a-same possum on to a big beam that hold up roof of that house and him sneak along this easy fellow. . . . Everybody been dead-sleep till that stick rotten from white-ant been break and make roof come down longa all-about. Talk about row when old man and women and dog get hit with everything . . . too funny . . . I been get out, and me and that Brownie been go into 'nother one place and play-about all night.'

Each tale portrays the mind of the story-teller. Baramundi gave to us a tale of how a superstitious friend of his slept in an iron building of a native settlement. Afraid of ghosts and alone, he shut up all windows and doors. Apparently all went well till a camp lover—mistaking the visitor's hut for that of his girl-friend—climbed through the window. The fearful roars and rattling of iron as the lover beat it for safety soon woke up the camp-dogs and the aborigines, who were up and rattling their spears at the unseen demons of the night.

So we would sit and talk beneath the shady trees. I told them stories, as they would expect me to do, and amidst the tales I heard the names of great story-tellers. 'Pat Laurie. . . . Him savee plenty language and mob stories. . . . Mirawong . . . can' lick that old man for proper story . . . when him talk-talk all-about cockatoo must listen for him make "eye come out" and "ear-hole crack".'

I made a mental note of these great story-tellers and as time went on I met up with them. But I always noticed that to get a good story I must let them tell it in their own way. To enquire in advance would only irritate them and they would brand me as a 'Mang-mang' or one who is ever saying 'what-what' to everything they say, and that means I am not listening 'right fellow way'.

So I heard a little of the story and waited my time to get a little bit more. Each part is told in its natural surroundings and to hear them I must remember it all. To begin writing would make them falter and I would be branded as a 'Strong-fellow-face'. So I took my time over the years and became as the aborigines—'Level 'gether all-a-same we'. Thus did I travel amidst the people, watching, but not intruding. I asked no questions but waited for the bird or animal or some little incident that would bring a picture to the mind of my native friend. Out of that picture would come a story or a part of the story. To get a good tale from the black man one must just drift along and never forget the aboriginal adage that 'No good worry-worry anything, by and by we all-a-same nothing.' In that environment have these tales been written.



PART ONE

TALES OF FANTASY

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THESE TALES belong to a class of narrative that is becoming rare in the Northern Territory. They were not told to me in the completed form but in the manner in which I have written them here.

The aboriginal Mirawong was the main story-teller; at any one time he would tell only a portion of the tale as if it were in serial form, reopening the narrative whenever we were together and something around reminded him of the story. Many of the tales were only told with the promptings of other people.

Thus a Larrakea aborigine called Kadjali reminded him of that portion about the geese-women and the magic ducks. Another native called Nadba refreshed his memory about the Wauwaluk girl dancing before the rainbow-serpent. From a black-tracker called Bul-bul old Mirawong received a prompting about the crocodile-man of the Daly river and from his wife Ditzzi came an inkling about the crocodile-women of the swamp-country. The part about Mamru and his journey into the python country came from a native called Dingle.

So with the story of the crocodiles and stars. The story of Manbuk is a myth that covers many tribes. The water-women and her dry country counterpart also covers a wide area, but out of trade the story has become a part of the main tale. Story-tellers like Mirawong gathered and retold them over and over to the tribes-people, and I have written them here out of what I have heard.

The part about Lobar and the devil's blood I have recorded as it was told by Mirawong. The tale of the Gecho brothers is really a big song-cycle told as a story around the camp-fires. The old Waddaman aborigine Kinunjun who told me the story beside the cave-place of Wahdohi was a great friend of mine. When I asked him in a jocular manner how old was the story, he laughingly explained that the tale was as old as rain, for by that story and song-cycle was rain, thunder and lightning first produced in that distant time when 'we all-about were as nothing'.

And now, as I write them beside the native camp-fires I have endeavoured to put in the camp-life and the people who were with me as these tales were told.

### Chapter 3

## OLD MIRAWONG

FROM THE aboriginal camp near a clump of jungle comes the deep-throated chant of a song-man as he records some story of the past. His tales are brief as one would expect with a people who live in oral tradition and, although his tale is full of meaning to the initiated, it is nevertheless crammed with a symbolism that is difficult to understand by those who are not versed in native ritual and custom.

As a background to the chanting one can hear the deep resonant drone of a *didjeredu* that only comes from a master-puller of these wooden drone-pipes, and as the droning thing gives out the rhythm one hears the 'alingpa' tap-sticks beat out the measure of the tune.

From where I sit I can see their camp and I notice that it is laid out in the manner of tradition as handed down from past ages. Kinship governs all procedure in camp behaviour, with the result that the camp-fires of taboo mothers-in-law must be well hidden from her daughter's husband and also some distance away. So too must adult brothers' and sisters' camp-fires be apart, for to be near one another would be tantamount to incest and that is a dreadful crime punishable in the past by death.

As the wind is blowing my way from their camp-fires I make a mental note of the catch they have hunted that day. Everything is grilling on their fires and amidst the cooking, eating and incessant chatter I can hear loud peals of laughter as a story-teller records an amusing incident of the hunt. Perhaps the things they are cooking reminds them of tales of other days.

I would like to go down and listen, but I know that my presence would upset the camp pattern because I am a 'whitefellow-man-and-different-kind'. So I sit along by my camp-fire listening to the noises of the night and await my turn, for when morning comes, they will come up my way and at my question about their laughter they will recount some of the tales to me.

One old native woman comes by and forever gives me the latest exploits of a great hunting dog she has beside her. The creature is old, poor and useless, but to her it is something that, 'Can beat all-about dog longa camp one-time easy-feller'. Her main theme about

Steamboat—the creature's name—is that, 'One day he been kill wallaby when all-about dog . . . blackfellow can't catch him'.

A young native girl who is listening half-heartedly to the oft-repeated tale explains to me as the old woman strokes her great pet that; 'Old woman just talk-talk nothing . . . that Steamboat been old and little-bit blind and sleep longa shady tree when that knocked-up wallaby been fall over him in trying to get away from all-about camp-dog and blackfellow who been run-em-up. . . .'

She gets no further with her story, for the old woman is up in arms over the accusation against her pet and beating the ground and bushes around she proclaims to all that 'they just make-em up that wrong-way story because they properly jealous of Steamboat'.

As the old woman and girl proceed on their way with the great Steamboat running on their heels an old black man called Mirowong strolls up with a spear-throwing *woomera* in his hand which he uses to flick things from the ground as he moves along and at my question as to 'what is on?' he answers simply, 'Just come up nothing . . . look-look friend and talk-talk little bit'.

He scratches the ground with his bare foot then, when satisfied that no prickly-burs were about he eased himself on to the soft earth with a deep sigh of contentment. Out comes his long wooden eyarra-smoking pipe which is an heritage from the early Malayan traders, and, thanking me for the 'little bit 'bacca' I handed out to him, he slowly filled up the pipe bowl, and as he lit it with a fire-stick from my camp-fire I recall a story others have told me about his childhood.

Many of the tribespeople around the swamp-plain to the westward of Darwin told me that old Mirawong of the Pongi-pongi tribe had 'been pierced in the ear-hole by a devil-devil' when he was a small child and, as happens to all of those who are affected that way, he was always talking to himself, the birds and the trees of his bush-lands, and they in turn would give him the good stories from the past to retell to his people. Gossip had it that the devil-ear-piercing business happened when his tribal clan was down hunting dugong and fish in the shallow waters of their coastline.

In those days the tribespeople were governed in their hunting pattern by the signs of nature that controlled the creatures on which they preyed. Let the yellow blooms of the river wattle show golden against the dry earth at the end of 'cold-weather time' and the aborigine hunters knew that the black bream were coming up the coastal rivers in an age-old cycle, and as they swim along the fresh-water crocodiles came out of the clear waters to lay their eggs under the warm sands of the river reaches so that they would hatch out before the early storms come on. Seeing these signs the tribespeople

would gather in these traditional places and soon all was noise and excitement as they feasted beneath the shady paper-bark-trees that lined the streams.

The red flower of the coral-tree was the sign that wild sweet-tasting bush potatoes were ready to be gathered by the tribeswomen, who would be off into the jungle places of their lands to root them out with their long sharp-pointed wooden digging sticks.

It was 'cold-weather time', Mirawong told me, 'and my people were down on the coast that was thick with the eel-grass that the dugong like too-much . . . big men of our tribe all day go hunting and we kiddies stay at home and play-about longa beach sand'.

I nodded assent at his words, for I too had often seen the little children at their games. Childhood to them was one of happiness then, for they had not yet reached that stage in life when each would be passed into class-groups with its responsibilities. The girls into the guidance of the females, where they would be taught the arts of the hunt from the woman's angle and the secrets of the woman's lodges that explained to them the origin and meaning of ritual and the strict taboos that went with them.

And as the girls went their way so would the boys be 'held' by 'tribal protectors', and with them they would wander far into other tribal lands, and that 'showing' would be an invitation that the on-lookers come in with trade and ritual to that 'held-one's' first initiation, when he would be circumcised and so pass into tribal society.

'We been all day playabout good fellow way,' Mirawong told me, 'little girl all day singing song as they play about with string longa finger, and we boys gammon fight with grass spear or playabout hunting all-a-same big hunting-man. . . . When that devil-devil been poke my ear-hole,' he continued, 'I was young boy . . . only blanket-ear-hole' [a native idiom that means uncircumcised; the metaphor refers to the frill-necked lizard] 'six more rain-times before, they been make me mulaluk (held-one) to make corroboree to give it me ring-bark' [Also a metaphor for circumcision, referring to cutting the bark around the trunk of a tree] . . . 'I been silly one kid and when we been play hide and seek game I been run too far into big jungle place and get lost.'

For days the tribespeople searched for his tracks amidst the leaf-mould of the jungle floor, but they were always held up in their search when the lad's footprints ended at the base of a large tree that grew in a cleared space amidst the tangled vines. Then on the fourth day an old woman found the lad sleeping peacefully beside one of their camp-wells, and great was the wailing and rejoicing as they carried him into the camp, but greater still was their astonish-

ment when he awoke and told them he was not hungry and began to cry for his jungle friends. He had somehow changed in those last four days and all listened with wonderment as he told them the story of how he had lived with the strange bush fairies who had been so kind to him.

'We call that little people Podji-podji,' Mirawong explained to me as he told me the tale. 'They small like baby but they are strong like stone. . . . I been cry-cry when I get lost and just run about anywhere in that big jungle. . . . I been sit down longa that big jungle tree when I hear big crack like tree when it break, and I look-look and see that big tree trunk open up like door of white-man's house and then I see little black man step out and come over longa me.

'I no more fright,' continued Mirawong, 'for that Podji-podji look so kind and straight away he been pick me up and we two fellow walk into that tree that shut behind us strong fellow way . . . we two fellow been go down big stair all-a-same longa whitefellow house and when on bottom stair that boss Podji-podji put me down and him wife and children treat me, not as little fellow boy but as big man like my father . . . uncle, outside in my own country.'

'Only four day I been stay longa that Podji-podji mob,' naïvely said Mirawong, 'but it was like that many raintimes (years) . . . that boss Podji-podji been take me longa bush and show me how to find bush tucker easy way . . . bird and wallaby can't run . . . somehow me look different for one day we been meet with one of my countrymen and him try fight that Podji-podji . . . him can't win for that little fellow just hold him over him head with one arm and with 'nother one hand him tickle that big fighting-man longa rib till him sing out no-more little-bit and when let go him race away one shot.

'They been teach me everything,' explained the old story-teller, 'then we have big feed and when I dead-sleep, must be they carry me out and when I wake up I been look countryman cry-cry longa me proper way.'

Thus out of his strange experience did old Mirawong grow up as a native child prodigy in a world of fantasy. The old people of the tribe shook their heads as they heard him talking to the crows and willy-wagtails around his camp, and always they were amazed by his predictions as to where bush game and foods were to be had in abundance, or the exact day when some strangers would arrive in their country. At first they believed it was guess-work, till one fatal morning when a laughing jackass gave him warning that a police patrol was coming their way to investigate some cattle-killing going on in the tribe. Believing him that time (and forever afterwards),

they had barely time to hide the stolen meat and cover up the tracks when the police and black-trackers arrived.

'My countryman get proper fright that time,' laughingly said the old man as a native friend of his came up and confirmed old Mirawong's tale, 'but after that all-about been learn quick fellow way and no more think-about 'nother way when I talk-talk'; then sadly, 'All that happen long time ago when all about blackfellow hunt plenty tucker longa bush . . . now plenty black kiddie go to white-man school where him learn to read from school book right fellow way . . . not like before when old-time blackfellow tell stories around camp-fire and children listen good-fellow way.'

Suddenly he cast a glance my way and remarked, 'Might be . . . someday . . . children belong to we might want to hear story like we been tell long time ago?'

'Might be,' I replied, 'might be.'

So Mirawong and his old cobber went on their way and that night I thought it over, and now, as he and his family sit beside my camp-fire in the bush I see Mirawong smile or hear him chuckle as a night-bird calls in the distance. I question, and smile at his vague reply of 'Nothing . . . just nothing think about'. Suddenly he and I would hear a strange sound out on the lagoon beside my camp, and instantly he would become alert. The subconscious mind of the old story-teller would become aroused and out would flow his stories that were part legend, yet somehow contained incidents related to happenings of another age, and there in the bush with its familiar settings I would sit and listen to a song-man recounting the adventures of people who are slowly changing their way of life through contact with our different religion and laws.

## Chapter 4

### OF CROCODILES AND STARS

CLEAR WAS the winter's night when Old Mirawong and I sat together on a sandy beach outside my bush-built home. Outside, the waves rolled lazily in upon the sandy beach and in the distance we could hear the low hooting of a *mook-mook* owl as it called to its distant mate.

Old Mirawong was chanting some old-time tunes, keeping time to the rhythm by beating two sticks together as was his custom.

Suddenly the sky became alight as a meteor sped across the heavens and as it did, the chanting stopped abruptly as the old fellow blew from his mouth a gush of wind towards the brilliant object as he clapped both hands over his ears. All was silence till the light faded away and then he spoke in a very learned manner.

'That thing proper cheeky one . . . all-about old people tell me that some blackfellow from 'nother one tribe all-time sing big devil-devil that sit in big cave close up longa emu-head in the big sky-road.<sup>1</sup> . . . When that blackfellow call him bad-friend's name then that devil-devil throw that big star-stone at that person who no more follow blackfellow law right way. One time,' he continued, 'wife of old man in my tribe been run away with sweetheart and that old fellow been get proper cranky . . . that old man him savee too-much that sky-stone business, so him sing song and throw magic-stone from his hair-belt, all-a-same sling . . . that stone been go under ground first time then come out hot fellow and race straight over that girl head . . . talk about fright . . . that girl been run back camp of old man and as she cry-cry longa camp-fire that old fellow talk he give her one more chance . . . suppose she run away one more time then that sky-stone finish em up dead proper fellow.'

Mirawong paused awhile to let the prowess of the mighty thrower of stars sink into the thick head of the whitefellow man as he gazed overhead. Suddenly he was alert once more as he beheld the constellation of Orion, and pointing at it he remarked, 'You see that

<sup>1</sup> Coal-sack and the Milky-way.

mob star like yard where white-man all day muster him bullock . . . that mob star we blackfellow call Manbuk and him all day chase that mob girl over there.'

I looked to where he pointed with his wooden pipe towards the Pleiades or the seven sisters of the bushmen, and seeing that I knew the cluster he meant he continued, 'Long time ago my old father . . . mother,' he sighed heavily at the mention of these dead taboo people, then continued sadly, 'they been die long time ago but they been teach me proper way longa my country.' He paused once more, then reminiscently, 'Good tucker in my country old man . . . goose like grass and all-day fat . . . wallaby sit down in jungle like fly in cattle country . . . bush potato in mob.' And then nostalgically, 'When I think about fat goose grilling longa fire in my country my mouth run like water.'

After a short pause the old story-teller continued. 'We lived in the paper-bark country of Lunggur, all right in cold-weather time,' he added, 'when grass was burnt proper way and we could fish and get plenty lily-tucker in the big lagoons, but rain-time too many mosquito come up from saly-water side, so out my people would go into the hill country, and there we would build big *goondies* (shelters) from bush logs and paper-bark to sleep from rain and mosquito who all-night come up on quiet nights to eat at all-about we.'

Old Mirawong gave me a running description of the mosquito-houses of the tribespeople, of how they would all crowd into them when the nights were noisy with the stinging pests and how his old father made the place airtight by blocking up the doorway and then . . . 'We children close up die from smoke and cry-cry no-more-little-bit as we try get good wind with face close up longa ground . . . proper rubbish one places . . . too much stinking one too,' he added.

I smiled at his description of the mosquito-houses, for I too was forced to put in a night in one of them when my mosquito net was accidentally destroyed by a bush-fire as I wandered through those swamp-lands. Seeing my plight an aboriginal family invited me to share their hut and afraid of the pests without I went in, and what a night I had. In despair I pressed my nose close to the earth to be away from the fumes and body odour, then I tried out a new move by making a small hole in the wall of the hut, but instead of air I only let in a whining horde of the savage pests that had everybody slapping and cursing—in their language—the stupid whitefellow. After a period that seemed like a year I was suffering all the tortures of one who has claustrophobia, so I did the unpardonable sin of getting out to let everything in, and after that night of horror it was

up sticks and away for me to a store and a new mosquito net to sleep under.

But not all nights were like that. Let the winds blow cool from the south-east and the black people would be out of their huts to sleep beside their camp-fires and as they did the children would listen to the noises of the night and wonder about it all.

'At that Lunggur place,' explained Mirawong, 'there was a big water-fall that was always roaring in the big storms. One time that river water shout out like thunder,' was his description of the falls. 'Nother time it make low fellow whisper like goose that talk-talk on swamp at early morning time.'

And hearing the ever-changing sounds of the waters Mirawong asked his father the meaning, to be told they were caused by the Yunggamurra water-girls who lived in the running streams and lagoons of their tribal lands. Legends recorded that they had been transformed from normal people into this way of living because they had broken a strict taboo.

'My father told me that doctor-blackfellow make them that way by magic-song,' the old story-teller explained, 'we have two kind in we country . . . one that live longa water and 'nother kind called Mungga-mungga that live in ant-hill longa dry country. . . . That one Mungga-mungga proper cheeky one,' he remarked warningly to a youth who came up as he called the names.' Suppose young man like you go sneak-about after 'nother man wife then that Mungga-mungga can make themselves like that one's sweetheart and when that young-fellow see her him talk-talk, "Ah! I, that my girl-friend." Suppose he chase-em-up then that mob dry-country girl wait longa bush and tear young-fellow like you into little fellow pieces with their sharp tooth and claw that is all-a-same pussy-cat.'

I smiled to myself as Mirawong gave the hint to that youth whom I knew to be a great one for running after other people's wives, realizing then that most of the legends and tales of devil-devils are a part of the tribal law to keep the youth in check. In the past the warning would come first and if it went unheeded the radicle would suddenly disappear and few would worry at the fool who would go 'wrong-side'.

As we watched the youth move towards the beach on his way to the native camp-fires, Mirawong winked slyly at me as he remarked, 'Bird been give me good story last night of how that young-fellow been sneak after 'nother man wife, so I let him know we savee and that make him think-about 'nother-one-way.'

'What about water-girl,' I questioned as I attempted to bring him back to the main story, 'all day you jump-about like that Moon-man

sweetheart who can't go right-way as he travels about longa sky,' and laughing at my reference to the Moon-man who would not keep to the tribal code, he replied. 'Moon-man and that young fellow that been just go away are same . . . two fellow "Ki-hi" and must run-about wrong-side all the time.'

After a few more puffs at his pipe old Mirawong continued with the main tale. 'My father told me that the water-girl always play-about in the water night-time.'

Further explanations revealed that the whispering sounds were made when the Yunggamurra's stood in a line across the running stream to dam up the waters with their bodies, and the roar of rushing waters was caused as they leapt aside and the entrapped stream flowed in a big wave over the boulders of the water-fall.

'My father told me that these water-girls were proper pretty ones who all day and night sing sweetheart songs as they lay on rock-places like crocodile do in cold-weather time. . . Proper danger one too,' he added warningly. 'Suppose man hear that magic-song, he must go to that mob water-girl who hold him with finger like crab till him dead.'

Then remembering something and drifting away as was his fashion he remarked, 'Blackfellow in country cold-weather side from we have water-girl that they call Nabeado. When that mob come longa we country for big corroboree him sell for trade sweetheart song that he get from that water-girl . . . that magic song make man . . . woman go mad for sweetheart business . . . no matter old man and woman . . . that water-girl song make them lively and everybody just run about longa bush to look about sweetheart just like young fellow . . . that magic-song proper danger one with wrong person.'

'Must be you been try it old man?' I interrupted.

'One time I been buy that water-girl song for big money but must be me different-kind for no matter I look about girl-friend I been find nothing . . . must be they been sell me rubbish-one kind.'

As he spoke I tossed some tea into a billy-can of boiling water and as we sipped at our pannikin of tea and ate at a slice of brownie, old Mirawong told me the story of Manbuk and the seven sisters of the heavens.

'Long time ago seven girls of a river tribe had been cursed by magic and ever they lived in the waters of a big lagoon. Many crocodile and ducks lived in that same water, but they were kind of friends with the Yunggamurra water-girls and all day and night these people would swim around in the waters of the lagoon and eat up the lily-bulbs and stems of that proper good tucker. . . I been

see one, one time when I was hunting duck and goose in a big billabong . . . good job she no more look longa me and start song . . . . One time I look and race like emu into scrub with hands over ear-hole to shut out their magic song. . . . I been dead lucky . . . that water-girl was proper pretty one and when I see her first time she been comb her hair with long finger, just like white woman do it with comb that we buy from store. . . . Her face was proper pretty one too . . . just sweet one like honey from bottle-brush tree in cold weather time . . . eye too like star or little fellow dew-drop that shine on grass early morning time, and titti (breasts) belong to that one was real "boy-milk" that everybody like too-much . . . must be that *podji-podji* business when I been kid make me free from that girl magic-song for everybody told me that once I look-look on that girl me finish. . . .'

When I questioned him of how I had once heard tell of a young man who caught one and asked him how it was done, he replied that people told him their bodies were covered with a slime like that on a cat-fish and the only way one could take told of a water-girl was to roughen the hands with the leaves of the sand-paper fig or to twist their long hair around one's left arm and thus leave the other one free to fight off the other water-girls, who would most certainly come to her rescue.

'My father told me,' continued Mirawong, 'that one day a young man of our tribe called Manbuk saw the seven girls as he hunted along the tall paper-barks that grew around the lagoon, but just as him look a white cockatoo in dry tree been see him too and sing out loud-fellow-way. . . .'

At the sound of the bird that is said to protect those who are connected with magic, Manbuk froze so as to look like the trees around, but the water-girls had seen him and slid beneath the lagoon waters so quietly that no ripple-marks remained to tell of their going. But there was one who was inquisitive and rose to the surface to have a glimpse at the earth-one, and, quick as a secretary-bird that stabs at the fish as it hunts on the sand-banks of the rivers, Manbuk grabbed at her long tresses that floated on the water about her and winding these around his left arm he gathered the helpless girl in his arms and fled from the accursed pool, escaping the sharp claws of her enraged friends only by speeding over a patch of burnt ground nearby.

'Munbuk been find out that that water-girl proper useless one . . . she no more understand anything,' continued Mirawong as he re-lit his pipe and puffed a great cloud of tobacco smoke into the night air. 'She was all-a-same nothing. That poor girl she just proper fright and all the time hold on to that one Manbuk and too fright

to look back on that lagoon where her sisters stand in row and sing out all-a-same wild dog when they cry-cry for mate at puppy-dog time.'

But Manbuk remembered a story his uncle had told to him of how the enemy of water is fire and the only way these water-girls can be rid of the curse is to hold them over a smoke that has been made from the fire of green bamboo stems.

Remembering this Manbuk built a fire of dried wood, and as it burnt fiercely he threw the green bamboo shoots into the flames. As the thick white smoke arose he held his girl captive in it and watched in amazement as a grey slime fell from her skin on to the ground as out of each pore in her body came vast swarms of leeches to splutter and die in the flames of the fire, and as it did, 'That young water-girl that was useless one now change meself into proper pretty one woman that can talk the same language as Manbuk and can understand his customs properly way.'

But the smoke from the cleansing fire had drifted towards the lily-lagoon and as it did the couple could hear faint chants as of the winds in the trees, and knowing the danger that could come from the sex-chants of the water-girls that can be heard above the crying of the wildfowl over the swamp-plains, they quickly hastened away from the accursed lily-lagoon.

So Manbuk and his new-found wife Milajun—for she told him that that was her name—hunted and feasted well on the country they travelled through and great were the feasts they had together. The magic curse that had transformed her into a water-girl had also given to her strange powers over the wild creatures of the bush around them.

At her soft call the wild bees would come out of their hive-nests in the hollow trees and show as a dancing cloud against the blue sky. At her bird-like call the wild fowl would fly around her head and thus fall an easy prey to Manbuk's throwing-sticks, and the drying stems of the sweet-tasting bush-potatoes of the jungle would crackle in their stems as the hunters went by and so betray their presence.

Everywhere they travelled was peace and happiness. The tribespeople loved the strange quiet girl because of her kindness to the aged and infirm. 'They been have happy time,' said Mirawong, 'no more row nothing . . . and one night when they been camp on soft-fellow sand place in my country that Milajun been tell that Manbuk the story of her life.'

At this part of the story Mirawong and I sat quiet and looked out into the still night. From the distance I could hear the low chanting of aborigines in their camps, and hearing them the old man

became somehow restless. Perhaps some symbolism in the chant had awoken in him a memory of past days. Suddenly he broke the silence to remark, 'Me go now for that story too long and more better me come up tomorrow when me think about proper way.'

With those final words he bade me a *Marmuk*—their word when departing—and moved off towards his camp. Next morning, as I was having breakfast he was there beside me, and as we sat together and 'ate up big', old Mirawong continued the tale of the crocodile and stars.

'That one Milajun's father Dunia was a great hunter and fisherman,' Mirawong began after we had made ourselves comfortable on the soft earth. 'Her mother's name was Ninual and she got six more sister all belonging to fish-dreaming (totem). They lived in the shady jungles that grew upon the banks of a big tidal-river that was full up wallaby and everything tucker that make everyone happy.'

Old Dunia—being a water-man—was ever cutting down the soft-wooded Kunagidji kapok-trees to make the big dug-out canoes that floated near his camp, and as a result of trading these he was known far over the land.

They were tall in the river jungle, and Dunia—'ever on the look-out for trade—would mark each tree as he came upon it and in doing this the other tribesmen would not cut the marked giant that had his sign, for that was the law of the tribe and it was obeyed by all. Thus would the trees stand until the canoe-maker shifted his camp that way to work on his trade.

How his girls would shout with joy as the giant crashed into the jungle and its big red blooms bounced over the green bushes and vines under the whip of its branches. Then when all was quiet and the green tree-ants removed from the branches around so as to give them freedom to work, Dunia and his daughters would gouge out the soft centre of the tree with their sharp-pointed fire-hardened digging-sticks and the stone axes that came to them as trade.

'Before whitefellow come,' explained Mirawong, 'blackfellow can't make canoe from hard-one tree, for stone-axe no good, so we been use bark from tree or this soft wood and cut it out like cattle-man make trough for watering cattle . . . horse . . . anything. Canoe that Dunia make was not pretty one like the one Malay-man been teach em we, but flat longa end and all time we pole it longa river with long fellow stick.'

Thus life went on merrily till Milajun and her sister next in line

reached the age of puberty and with that event that, 'cranky-one Dunia been try catch em daughter wrong-fellow-way . . . must he been mad'.

It was Dunia's habit to pole his canoe along the river to hunt—with fishing spear—the tides that brought the run of fish into the feeding grounds, in search of the king-prawns that sheltered in the waving grasses and reeds that grew in the shallow reaches of the stream. At the end of the run he would return with the falling tide to his camp, and as he tied up his canoe to a shady river tree he would call loudly that his daughters come and help carry up the day's hunt.

'Him been call out cunning way,' laughingly from old Mirawong, 'think him dry-nose (clever) but that Ninual she no more fool and think about meself. Must be this Dunia want to humbug him girl . . . I give him trick . . .'

Next day, after the usual work on his canoe-making Dunia went up the river to fish, and when out of sight Ninual climbed with her family into a tall banyan-tree nearby and there, in a bush-shelter 'close up longa stars', they awaited the change of the tide and the return of the canoe-making fisherman.

Towards evening they heard him call that the girls come to help him carry up the fish, and looking down from their leafy home they beheld him far below with a cat-fish in each hand as he wandered up the jungle path towards their old camp-fire, and calling in reply to his 'hail!' they heard his faint answer, 'Where are you?'

'We are up here,' Ninual answered from their leafy home above, and gazing upwards into the heavens he saw his family looking down upon him, and at the sight Dunia knew that his shame was known to all, so he cried aloud in despair as he beat himself on the back with the cat-fish he held in his hands, and in doing it the sharp spines of the fish caused great scars to appear on his back.

Watching from above Ninual called aloud as she lowered to him one of the stout root-like vines that grow down from the branches of the banyan tree, 'Take hold of this root-vine, old man . . . take hold and we will pull you up into this new home.'

'Proper trick they been give that rubbish-one Dunia,' commented my old story-teller. 'Him think straight away that that Ninual soft-one-binji (kind and forgiving) but him think wrong way . . . that Ninual got binji like stone and want to punish her husband proper way.'

So Dunia grasped the root-vine that was lowered to him and soon he was swaying in the sky far above his river jungle home. Looking down as he was pulled upwards he could see the river winding

away towards the sea, and along it he beheld small black dots upon the stream and knew them as the log-canoes of his hunting tribesmen. Then he looked upwards and shouted encouragement as they pulled hard upon the vine-rope: But his happiness was short-lived when he beheld his wife cut at the rope with her stone-axe, and as it parted with a loud crack she called aloud, 'They who look with lust on their daughters must die.'

'Dunia been sing out no-more little,' laughingly from Mirawong as he described how the incestuous one rolled over and over as he plummeted earthward, and falling thus, the stricken fisherman kept calling aloud. 'I am falling . . . I am falling . . . I am falling.' Three times he called ere his body fell with a loud thud into a large lily-covered lagoon beside the river-bank, and watching that spot, Ninual and her daughters were overcome with a great fear as they beheld a large crocodile crawl from that place and disappear into the tidal waters nearby. Then it arose once more to the surface, as is the fashion of those creatures, and cried aloud in the voice of Dunia that he would never die but be reborn over and over again and ever grow fat at each full moon by devouring the soul-shades of those who disobey the tribal way of life.

For three days after their father's death Ninual and her daughters remained in the tree top to watch the river, and then, on the third evening, they beheld the first new moon in the sky over sun-down way, and as the orb grew bigger each night the outline of Old Dunia became plainer upon it. Then one night they beheld a rainbow circle around the full moon and seeing that ritual sign they knew that the Moon-people were dancing their sacred dances of reincarnation, so they returned to the earth, to find it full of wailing sorrowing people.

'Plenty children been die,' sadly said Mirawong. 'Big sickness been come up on children and all-about savee that that Moon-man Dunia been eat up mob baby shade so that him grow full and fat-fellow each full-moon-time. All time that Moon-man get full up shade before him fall down into alligator like first time . . . then him born again and once more grow fat same way . . . properly rubbish one way.'

Now in Dunia's tribe lived an old woman of the brown-bittern totem, and legend recorded that she was immortal. Eternal life was hers because, in her youth, she had stolen its secret from an elder who had overcome the great shade-spirit of death in a savage battle, and obtaining the talisman of life from him he had foolishly hidden it in the distant hill of Bernarabin. For many rain-times the secret was held by the elders of the tribe, but there came that fatal day when the brown-bittern girl wheedled the secret from them

by her magic songs of sex and thus did the old people die as she lived on.

To the brown-bittern woman went Ninual in fear to ask her advice but . . . 'We were fools,' sadly from Milajun as she told Manbuk her story, 'only afterwards did we learn that the old woman was in league with Dunia, and hers was the job of sneaking around the native camps each night. Sneaking and seeking out those children whose mothers had forgotten to sweep away their footprints with a green bush as was the tribal custom, and it was her call in the night that enticed the soul-shades from these neglected children into the hungry jaws of Dunia who grew fatter and fuller as the nights went by.'

'That brown-bittern woman was proper cunning one,' Mirawong told me. 'That old Dunia was still hungry for his girls, so he got the brown-bittern woman to wing magic songs into them so that they would be changed into the Yunggamurra water-girls that must always live in that lily-lagoon with Dunia's crocodile dreaming, and there they were till that Manbuk came to find his Milajun.'

'That Milajun been tell good story old man,' commented Mirawong, as I handed him a pannikin of tea and a slice of brownie. 'That two-fellow been have very happy time . . . but they do not understand one thing. . . . Milajun was all-right in dry time, but in rain time . . . everywhere was danger for she was still half water-girl.'

Hot were the days and humid the nights as the rain-time drew over the lands of the Pongi-pongi. The bush trees that had cast off their leaves owing to the dry time were now bursting with new many-coloured leaves, and the cherry-plum trees were all in bloom and calling up the rain-birds that gave a message to the tribesmen that soon the billabongs would be brimming with ducks and magpie-geese. They came in the mating seasons to welcome the old sun-woman who was once more returning into their lands to drive, with her blazing torch, the spirits of cold-weather-time before her, and thus allow the 'frog-men' of the storms to build up the clouds above so that the angry 'thunder-women' of the skies could battle with each other, and hurl into the heavens their lightning-flecked stone-axes.

'Manbuk been no more listen . . . him too-much like that salt-water side and the mob tucker of the billabong country,' commented Mirawong as he explained how Manbuk and his wife slept in the shade of a giant banyan-tree whose branches reached into the skies.

Peaceful was his dreams until a rumbling of thunder overhead brought to Manbuk a strange dream.

He dreamt that far overhead, amidst the green bushes of that shady tree, he could hear soft voices calling to Milajun that she reach up and grasp, with her two hands, the vine-rope that dangled above her head. His dream was such that he could see and hear it all, yet he could not move. Watching the scene he beheld his loved one grasp the rope, as the voices above bade her, and in sorrow he saw Milajun rise towards the tree's branches. He called to her in his dream, and at her faint reply for help, the trance which held him powerless disappeared, and quickly he sped to her rescue.

'But too late,' excitedly from Mirawong, 'that Manbuk been leap high fellow into the air but him can't reach that girl . . . loud fellow him sing out, for him proper sorry-fellow, but him can't do nothing, only watch her rise up longa sky . . . too bad. Then big noise like thunder or axe longa tree, and rain, or might be that Milajun's tears, fall down from top-side and when that rain fall on Manbuk him understand that she must go back to that Dunia crocodile lagoon all-a-same before.'

In sorrow Manbuk saw his loved one rise on the rope-vine, as did her father Dunia and, as he fell, so did she towards the accursed lagoon beside the river. So calling and running beneath her as she fell he only reached the lagoon to see his one-time wife sink beneath its lily-covered surface, and sitting in sorrow beneath a clump of pandanus palms he knew that this was the magic of the brown-bittern woman. Knowing this, he vowed to release Milajun from the evil curse . . . but how?

The noise of a stick breaking beneath the foot of an intruder forced Manbuk to turn quickly to behold an old man standing before him, and he called aloud in his surprise, 'Who are you?'

'I am Nartu,' replied the other, 'head-man of the Sun-dreaming . . . my home is in a cave beneath the earth and it is I who sends and calls the Sun-woman on her errand of light and heat each day . . . you are in trouble my boy, what do you want of me?'

Patiently Nartu heard Manbuk's tale, then he replied, 'Go you sun-down-way, and after that many days'—he held up five fingers to give the number as was the custom of the people—'and you will come to my camping place. My cave is on a wide plain,' he further explained, 'but you cannot mistake the spot, for it is dry and desolate and the burnt-looking hill beside my cave-place can easily be found.' He further warned Manbuk, 'Do not go to my cave-place during the night for the sun-woman, who sleeps beneath the earth at that time, would kill you with her fiery breath . . . go when the

sun is overhead and into the gaping hole beside my camp-fire cast a lighted fire-stick and then flee from the place.'

'So Manbuk went as the sun-boss told him to do,' Mirawong explained after his long description about the sun-place. 'Five day he been walk till he find that rubbish-one plain and him proper fright when he come to that big hole in ground beside the sun-man's camp-fire.'

Old Mirawong explained at length how Manbuk peered over the edge of the sun-cave into its dismal depths, then seeking and finding the well-worn track of some rock-wallabies that sought shelter and water within, he went downwards into that place of the Sun-boss.

Everywhere around him, as he scrambled between large boulders of black stones, were cliff-faces of red jasper covered with the pictures of the black man's art, and at long last, beside an old camp-fire, he saw the place down which the Sun-woman went each night as she travelled under the earth into sun-rise-way.

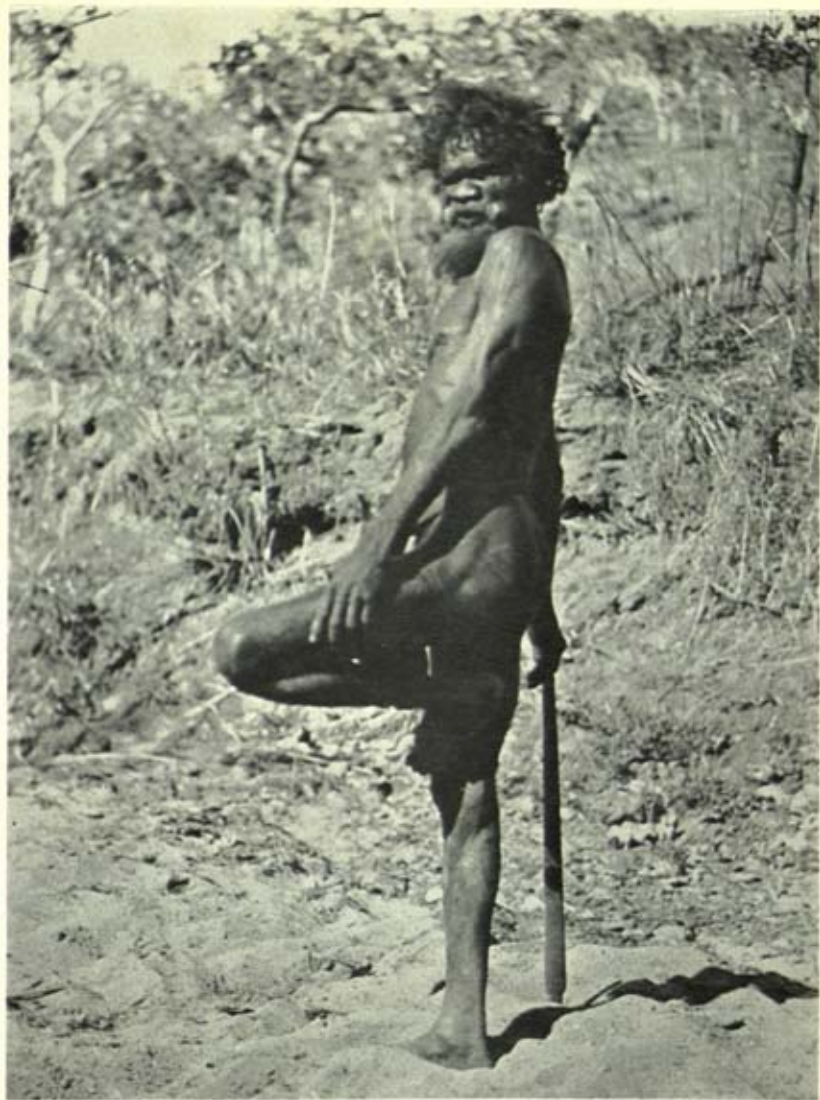
Fearfully Manbuk lifted on high the fire-stick he was carrying in his hand and threw it as he was bidden to, into the depths, and as the lighted torch went downwards into the darkness he heard a great rumbling in the earth beneath his feet and a hot wind swept over him as he fled out into the sunlight above.

And running from that terrible place, the affrighted man felt his skin crackle and dry up as the sun-woman above blew a hot wind over all, and moving onwards he noticed that the running springs of water he had passed on his outward journey were fast drying up. Fearing that he might perish from lack of water, he made a large water-carrier from the bark of a mess-mate tree and this he filled to carry on his return.

Everywhere over the land was a terrible drought. 'Big shady tree dead-fellow and everywhere bird fall down dead,' sadly said Mirawong. 'Too much that Manbuk mad when him make trouble with that Sun-woman over girl-friend . . . young fellow . . . girl . . . always like that, got bad-head (jealous) and no more think-about.'

Manbuk was just in time to see the lagoon of Dunia dry up. Everywhere over its muddy bottom were drying lilies amidst stinking fish and blow-flies. Eagerly he searched amidst the still damp logs of paper-bark-trees where giant crocodiles reared up in defiance as he advanced upon them, and as he passed them by he could hear their massive tails flailing the drying mud as they tried to escape the death that would soon come upon them.

Then, faintly from a small pool of water beneath some shady trees, Manbuk heard soft calling, and going that way he beheld the



The traditional pose of a good story-teller. (See "The Story-tellers")



The lagoon of the "water-girls". (See "Of crocodiles and stars")



The lily-lagoon formed by the Wauvaluk maidens' ritual dance.  
(See "Numeuk the Hunter")

seven water-girls wailing in the fish-laden slime. Quickly he advanced to claim his loved one and as he did he felt rain-drops falling on his body as a loud peal of thunder came from above.

'That rain been make everything no good,' Mirawong explained, 'fire and hot sun beat water-girl, but rain and water make them lively, so that mob Yunggamurra, with Milajun longa middle, been just run from that rubbish place to a big leg-of-rain that came down upon them from sky . . . too bad, for that Manbuk come too late and now him lose him proper sweetheart.'

The old story-teller went on to tell me how Manbuk sped after them as he loudly chanted the emu-song that was said to give his legs speed when in the hunt, and as he ran, 'like big wind in rain-time', he could hear the fleeing girls calling as dingoes do during the mating season.

Manbuk nearly overtook them when they came to the falling rain, and still wailing like dingoes they swam upwards along the river-of-the-sky, and in his despair Manbuk leapt into the sky to pursue them for ever across the heavens.

'Can't stop following them,' concluded Mirawong, 'that Manbuk always chase them seven dog-sisters along that big sky road.'

With those final words of the story he pointed out to me once more the great hunter Orion and the seven sisters of our own mythology, then carefully lighting his long wooden pipe he continued, 'We mob blackfellow all time watch for that mob star to come up early morning in cold-weather-time.'

'Why?' I questioned him.

For a long time the old man sucked at his pipe then he answered. 'That Manbuk him proper hunting-man and he and Milajun mob are bosses for puppy-dog-time. . . . When that mob come up in cold-weather-time the dingos come together too, and have plenty puppies in nest by sandhill and stone-place . . . and when we black-fellow see that sign we too go out to look-look for dingo track where they carry tucker back to hiding place nest to feed their little fellow puppies . . . black-people got right law and they follow it proper way . . . that right . . . ain't it?'

I nodded agreement, and after a short pause he added, nostalgically: 'When I was little fellow kid I all night look-look for that mob star in cold-weather-time, for I all-time like go walk-about in new country and all time we eat puppy-dog for they were proper fat and good tucker.'

'What about whitefellow dog and what about now?' I questioned him, and smilingly he replied, 'Whitefellow dog friend for everybody

and we can't eat pet . . . and nobody eat dingo pup now . . . too much whitefellow tucker make us go different way.'

With those final words he bade me 'Marmuk', and as I watched him return to his camp with its wailing dogs I was reminded once more of the Yunggamurra water-girls speeding across the skies with the mighty Manbuk following in their trail.

## TWO-FELLOW LEVEL 'GETHER

Missus boy and my little boy two fellow grow up 'gether,  
Level play in mud all day longa the rainy weather;  
Two-fellow chase em dog all-time, fight and climb em tree,  
Listen hard when my man tell stories longa to we.

That little white kid him likem me, properly nice one boy,  
My old man go bush all day, cut em out boomerang toy;  
Two-fellow play-play all the day, one fellow black one white,  
Two fellow same when play at game, two-fellow level fight.

And my old man him say to me, 'must be someone mad,  
Whitefellow think him all time good, blackfellow all time bad;  
But kiddie him no more think that way, two-fellow level play,  
Whitefellow talk-talk one-fellow God, two-fellow level pray.

'Blackfellow all day help em white, somebody must be fool,  
Whitefellow boy go different kind whenever him go to school;  
"Can't understand," my old man say, "somewhere somebody  
mad."

But I no more listen, me only see, two kid happy and glad.

So I talk, 'old man, listen here, no more growl-growl white,  
All-about must live him way, which one say him right?  
Kiddie him play-play every day, kiddie him no more fool.  
Two-fellow level understand when two-fellow level school.'

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## NUMEUK THE HUNTER

THE BIG paper-bark swamps were noisy with the cries of water-fowl, and the camp-fires of the aboriginal hunters were heavy with the smell of grilling geese.

I had been out with the native hunters that morning and had helped them gather in the magpie-geese that breed prolifically in the reed-covered lagoons of the flood-plains of the Finness River area. The method they used to hunt the birds that morning had been evolved by camouflage and mimicry based on the principle that to survive the maximum food must be gathered with a minimum of energy. The hunters always selected bushy-topped paper-bark-trees along the flight-route of the birds as they went from roosting to feeding grounds. Should the trees be difficult to climb then sharp-pointed stakes were driven into the soft paper-like bark (that gave these trees their name), one above the other, and up these, as on a primitive ladder, the camouflaged hunters climbed to an improvised platform on top to await the coming of the birds. Each hunter had already provided himself with many light throwing 'goose-sticks' that he had made for the occasion, and these he carried in a human-hair-belt that encircled his waist. On the ground, beneath the tall trees, other old and less agile people awaited under cover to enact their part when the main event began.

As a 'whitefellow man' I was somehow out of line with this traditional pattern, so I sat beneath a shady tree a little distance away to view the scene . . . and what a sight I saw.

The wild chirruping of the honey-birds gathering nectar from the paper-bark blooms was interrupted as the first flight of the geese came into the swamps. As they approached the platform trees the earth and bushes became alive with the mimicking-calls of the birds. I noticed the leader of the first flight-formation turn its head to listen; then it changed course and glided into the first of the decoy-trees. After that all was pandemonium as the air became filled with throwing goose-sticks and falling birds that honked loudly as they fell, and these distress calls decoyed in other flights of birds as the slaughter went on.

And now we had brought our catch back to the camp-fires and old Mirawong had just handed to me a grilled goose that had been

prepared for cooking by first soaking the feathered birds in the water of the lagoon nearby; when thoroughly soaked the wet geese were tossed on to the flames of the cooking-fires so that the steam would soften the flesh around the tough quills and thus make them easy to remove. After the plucking and singeing, each bird would be cut lengthways along the backbone, when it would open up evenly and flat. Then the entrails would be removed and prepared as minor grills, while the birds would be laid out on the red-hot coals of the camp-fires and cooked according to the taste of their owners.

Thanking my host as I accepted the juicy bird, I took hold of each leg in the approved camp manner, and tearing the bird apart I began to eat as I gazed upon the scenes around me.

Everywhere I could hear the happy laughter of children around the separate camp-fires; each child seemed to be cooking a special tit-bit on the end of a light green stick which he used as a fork. Noticing my interest in the things around me, old Mirawong pointed up into the paper-barks of the lagoon with the half-chewed drum-stick of a cooked goose which he had in his hand and remarked; 'My country-man been learn how to get geese that way from a properly good hunting-man called Numeuk.'

A few mosquitoes buzzing about had him absent-mindedly using the burnt claw of the goose-leg as a practical back-scratcher, and after this distraction he continued:

'That Numeuk was a proper good hunter. He and his tribal brother, two-fellow messmate, would all day go out and hunt goose in swamp-country in this fashion, but at that time black-people had no way of making fire with fire-stick so they carried a blazing stick around with them as they travelled and hunted from camp to camp.

'One afternoon the two hunting men returned to their camps to find out that their two half-mothers who cooked for them had allowed the camp-fires to go out, yet the birds they had brought in that morning were nicely grilled and ready to be eaten . . . that Numeuk and him half-brother been ask that two woman how they been cook bird, and the two women been talk-talk wrong-way that they been sing magic-song into the sun and that song been make the old Sun-woman throw out plenty hot-wind that cooked the goose nice way.

'But that Numeuk and his half-brother knew that that old people been tell lie, so they make it look they go away, and after little bit-long-time they sneak back to camp, not calling out and clapping hands together as man must do in tribal way, and when they return they been see that rubbish-one women cooking that goose with the heat that came from their bodies as they chanted sexual-songs over them.'

And seeing that terrible thing, the two hunters ran from that awful scene with covered faces as is the custom when in the presence of taboos, and running they vowed to have revenge on those evil ones of incest, and secretly they plotted the destruction of the tribal mothers they now disowned.

'They were not properly mothers,' explained Mirawong at my question about the laws of matricide. 'That country had big sickness when Moon-man Dunia been fall down into crocodile, and that two women been grow up that two-fellow boys after their mothers and fathers died . . . when like that we people call that woman woman mother for she been grow us up and look after we.'

In secret Numeuk and his half-brother went to the place where the women of the tribes put their large grass fish-traps into a big lagoon, and chanting as they burnt and scraped the black wax from an ironwood-tree-root they soon had enough to help them with their vow.

Now the two men chanted the song of the crocodile as they rubbed the black ironwood-wax on their faces, and as they did so, they were slowly transformed into the reptiles of the chant. Then they patiently waited, in a clump of green pandanus, for the taboo women to come down to the lagoon to gather the fish from the traps, as was their custom.

Soon they heard the whispering of the women and the soft patter of their feet as they came down the bush-track from their camp, and, hearing this, they quietly slid beneath the waters of the lagoon to hold the fish-traps fast with their strong jaws.

From above they heard the angry talk of the women as they pulled at the traps, to find they were snagged on the bottom of the pool, and shortly afterwards they saw the women coming down the fish-trap rope to release them.

'That two-fellow crocodile been drown that rubbish women one-time,' laughingly from Mirawong as he wiped his greasy fingers on the hair of his head. 'Good job too for they been do things wrong-way.'

As he spoke he held up for my inspection a goose's head, and pointing to the nasal-hole above its beak he remarked, 'You look that hole longa goose nose . . . well before that time when Numeuk and him half-brother drown them women, goose got no hole in nose . . . but them women had hole in nose from black-fellow custom and when they been change into goose then all-about that bird follow their law . . . that is why we people know that that story is true-fellow. . . . Same way with crocodile . . . clean longa face first time, but not got black lump on nose from ironwood wax.'

Mirawong paused awhile to eat a portion of goose and also let the

wisdom from his forbears sink into the skull of the whitefellow; then, noting my interest he continued.

From his conversation I learnt that, although the men and the women were transformed into crocodiles and geese, their shades returned to the land as a totem-form. 'We call that one shade, "Dreaming". It just like our father . . . mother. It give us our name all-a-same that one longa whitefellow.' He paused a little to think over that problem in kinship, then added questioningly, 'That right, ain't it?'

I nodded acceptance and he went on to explain that 'as Numeuk had shown to all people the wickedness of the geese-women he became head-man of the Crocodile totem. Not king-business like whitefellow . . . but big boss, because he was properly clever with devil-blood-business'.

'Devil-blood-business?' I queried and he replied: 'Devil-blood make that man who got it real clever-fellow and him all day lucky, but sometime wrong man get it and then big trouble.'

The sun was rising high into the heavens and as the heat increased I noticed that many of the feasting aborigines were moving off into the shady places, and seeing this old Mirawong remarked, 'More better me go now old man . . . must be I got to tell you that proper funny one story about my brother Lobar and the devil-blood-business.'

'But what about Numeuk?' I replied.

'Devil-blood story first time then behind I tell good tale of Numeuk and his girl-friend,' laughingly said the old man.

With those final words old Mirawong gathered up the remnants of his cooked geese into a large sheet of clean paper-bark and hoisting this under his arm he moved off down the bush-track as I returned to my camp.

A few days later I met my old cobbler the story-teller as I was rambling through the bush and came upon a little group of natives chattering around the limb of a fallen tree that had just been cut down in order to get at a bush-bees' nest within. They called me over to share in the feast and as I sucked at the honeycomb that had been handed out to me in a piece of bark I reminded old Mirawong about the tale of Numeuk, and laughingly he answered. 'No good hurry up me too much old man, suppose do then me close-up knock-up. First time you hear story of the devil-fat business that been fool my brother . . . rubbish one my brother Lobar been get . . . not like the good one Numeuk had that all-day made him clever.'

Then, pretending to be alarmed at a little girl who stole up behind him with a green twig in her hand, he handed to her a small

portion of the honey; then sitting down on one of the limbs of the honey-tree he told me the following tale in the narrative form I have written here.

'My youngest brother Lopor was a good worker who all-time work hard fellow way for a white boss who had sailing-boat, and him and 'nother mob blackfellow all-time gather trepang from island and send it to China for money. Too much hard work, that one job, and plenty time my brother would like go on holiday in bush, but he been too long with white people and too much whitefellow tucker been make him useless for hunting bush way . . . that Lopor him just like white people who all time work-work in town and can't go away, for him wages just keep him and him missus and kids alive . . . that Lopor too-much sorry for that white-boss who been get him when he was little fellow kid and now him big man he no more like to leave him friend.

'But sometime that white-boatman sail him boat to mainland to look about black girl that him like too-much, and one day they been go and anchor in river close up to big billabong that was full up lily-tucker. Mob black people longa bank so that whitefellow been send out mob young girl to hunt lily for eat and a *munja* tucker that him all time carry in him boat like white-man flour, and, as they anchor, a blackfellow called Lumberlili come up and sit down under shady tree near river.

'That Lumberlili was fat-one . . . no-more-little-bit . . . him just like buffalo longa green grass in swamp country and all-about young girl laugh properly way as him chuck-wind like fat bullock that lay down on drover's camp in night time; when they laugh him always growl-growl as him lay down easy-way. "You mob blackfellow proper fool . . . must hunt hard way longa bush or work for white man . . . but me . . . I go different way with different business," he tapped a grass-string dilly-bag that hung around his neck. "This one feed me proper way."

'Lopor been listen-listen hard fellow-way when that Lumberlili talk, and him think-think meself, "Must be this fat-one got devil-blood . . . suppose I buy from him then me clever one too".'

'So Lopor talked cunning-way to that Lumberlili. "That devil-blood you got must be good one?" And straight away that 'nother one make answer, "Devil-blood make me boss for Djarada-business too . . . suppose I sing sweetheart song then all-about pretty one girl must follow me for she can't get away from that Djarada business."

Then, at great length, Lumberlili explained to Lopor the secret of the devil-blood business. 'This thing proper magic, when you hungry it make everything you want.' Then telling Lopor to go and

get a billy-can of water from the lagoon, the man-of-magic placed it on a ready-built heap of bush twigs that suddenly burst into flames under the magic of Lumberlili's Djarada songs.

'Then that magic-man been sing 'nother-one song and straight away that billy-can boil and got tea, sugar in it. Lopor can't make-it-out for that Lumberlili got nothing longa him finger,' explained Mirawong.

Lumberlili's next display of the Djarada-business was to pull a sheet of paper-bark from a tree nearby as he chanted one of his magic songs, and showing this apparently empty thing to the mystified Lopor, he carefully rolled it up as the native people do when cooking a meal of crushed lily-seeds and this he put into the hot ashes of the fire before him. After the required chant he asked the now excited Lopor to take it out. The young man did as he was told and when he undid the burnt package he called out in amazement when he found a newly cooked whiteman's damper inside.

'That Djarada tucker,' Lumberlili cautioned Lopor as he attempted to eat some, 'proper good one for sweetheart business. When you buy my devil-devil blood then I give to you the songs and you will be clever-fellow all-a-same me.'

Lumberlili then explained how, as a part of the magic-sweetheart business, he would have to rub Lopor with his, Lumberlili's sweat, for by doing this, he would neutralize the Djarada-poison that made the uninitiated who ate the food vomit violently. 'When you buy and I rub, then you sing Djarada song and after that you touch sweetheart and give her magic-tucker and straight away that girl go mad and follow you everywhere.'

"'But suppose man who got that devil-blood and no got whiteman tucker and him longa bush, what then?" Lopor been say, and that cunning one make answer:

"Devil-blood best when blackfellow go bush, this dilly-bag longa my neck make you different kind . . . fat kangaroo can't see you and you can spear him close up, easy way . . . with devil-blood you win all the way . . . too much tucker . . . too much girl-friend."

"'Might be all-about boy longa my girl friend make trouble?" Lopor been ask cunning way, but Lumberlili say, "Nothing . . . devil-blood make you tongue strong and all about listen longa you and sit down one time when you talk-talk, and suppose man throw spear at you then this devil-blood knock that spear aside all-a-same nothing."

For a few days Lopor thought over the buying of the devil-blood. His white boss had some tucker and tobacco in the hold of his boat, so thinking of the good holiday he was going to have, he at last made up his mind and decided he would buy the devil-blood.

'That boss been ask Lobar how him get good crew-man to help him with boat,' Mirawong explained, 'but just then that Lumberlili been come up and say he could do the job until the whitefellow go longa mission-place where he would pick up number-one crew-man all-a-same Lobar.'

So Lobar received the rations that were his due for the work he had done for his white boss, and this he paid over to Lumberlili, who passed on to him the magic devil-blood and the songs that went with them to make them potent, and sitting on the bank of the river as his white friend sailed away Lobar was 'Little-bit-sorry for him friend but proper glad to start work on his Djarada business that would give him everything'.

'Poor-fellow my brother,' sadly said Mirawong, 'I been see him one moon later and him proper bone-begger like dingo-puppy that all-day eat fish and hermit-crab longa salt-water-side, and when I see him I sing out longa him, "Whatname?" and him say sorry-way that Lumberlili been cheat him, for that devil-blood he been buy was just rubbish-one. "I been give good whitefellow tucker for nothing, must be I was mad one when I been listen longa that rogue one blackfellow."

'Then Lobar been tell me proper story about how that man been give him trick,' bitterly added Mirawong, 'and straight away we two-fellow been open up that dilly-bag and inside some paper-bark we find two pieces of bloodwood bark and gum all-a-same dry blood, and straight away we two-fellow get proper angry longa that fat-fellow crook-man.'

From Mirawong's tale I learnt that the two brothers went in search of the culprit and at last found him amidst a 'mob black-fellow salt-water-side where they all-day eat flying-fox that hang down day-time in mangrove country'.

The meeting of seller and buyer of the devil's blood was full of loud talk and the rattling of reed-spears, and apparently it got a little out of hand in the beginning, according to Mirawong's account.

'My brother Lobar and me, two-fellow messmate, been fight Lumberlili with strong one nulla-nulla (fighting stick). I been fight from front,' he continued, 'and as we two fellow fight, that Lobar been sneak up behind and he been make that devil-blood robber eye come out when he hit him hard way longa head, and when my brother hit him, Lumberlili fall down longa ground straight away and then we hammer him no-more-little-bit till we two-fellow knock-up and him look like dead. We been sit down now, and when we do, that cunning crook-man been jump up longa feet and race, all-a-same emu when eagle-hawk chase him . . . straight

away we savee then that that Lumberlili can't fight but him proper champion running-man.'

After that opening fight the tribal elders somehow got control and held a big council, telling the youth of the tribe that 'no good fight-fight all-a-same dingo but sit down and talk quiet fellow way in blackfellow fashion'.

The 'blackfellow fashion' was for the men to sit in a circle with their heads bent towards the earth, with the plaintiff's and defendant's tribal lawyers talking for them. The first to hold forth was Lobar's father-in-law, who was very wrathful about the handing over of the white man's food that should have come to him by tribal law.

'I been dead-laugh,' Mirawong remarked as he described the scene. 'That old man not worry about Lobar's devil's blood but him think about his own binji and that tucker him been lose, so I wait to hear what 'nother man got to say and I been properly heart-crack when that Lumberlili get up and talk-talk different-way.

'Him talk-talk that he been sell proper-one devil's blood. When him say that, all about have hard time hold em that one Lobar who been want to start more fight, but I meself been listen hard way to that Lumberlili, and straight away I think that might be him right.'

Lumberlili's defence was to ask the people to look at the condition he was in. 'One time I was proper fat one,' him say, 'but since I sold that devil's blood me proper poor one and all day sick. I been close up die when I sell my good luck, but at that time I was sorry for my friend Lobar who now all day swear and belt em me over nothing . . . must be somebody been steal my good devil blood from Lobar when him sleep.'

'Now when Lumberlili talk-talk strong mouth like that, I look up from ground to let him know that I think him right, and then I see that Lumberlili been win, for everybody was looking up at him and by that way do we blackfellows tell the talking-man that we believe in what he is saying—that is our custom—then straight away Lobar say, "That one black-tracker Maran been come up longa my camp just when Lumberlili and boat go away. Might be he been steal it?"'

"When I look Maran that time," quick-fellow from Lumberlili, "he was thin like bush-turkey at grass-hopper-time but when I see him longa mission place him fat like dugong and all day sing Djarada-song and make sweetheart with mission-girl who hang around him like fly on horse in rain-time."

"Must be that Maran been steal my good-luck," angrily said Lobar, "Him get big-head now that he is little-bit-policeman."

'As we talk-talk,' continued Mirawong, 'we see smoke from bush and no-more-long-time two blackfellow come up from mission with letter-stick and story that white policeman and tracker Maran been take Lopor's promised wife from mission-station into the big town, and when they give us that news all-about get properly mad and talk-talk of big trouble when they catch that rubbish one Maran.'

"What about Lopor," I asked Mirawong and he laughingly replied, "No good cry-cry for nothing . . . blackfellow can't hold trouble longa him binji . . . him soon lose his worry."

Mirawong explained that Lopor went back to work for his white boss and some time afterwards they sailed for the big town, and in it they saw Maran who, 'been tell proper one story'.

'That Lumberlili all time sell rubbish one devil's blood to young blackfellow who no more understand . . . everywhere him give same trick . . . but proper devil's blood him still carry for that make him clever-fellow.'

Further information on blackfellow's business revealed that when Lumberlili sailed with Lopor's boss to the mission he sang Djarada business to all the girls there and they been go, 'proper mad for boy . . . Lopor's girl-friend was more worse and when she go little-bit-mad the white policeman and Maran been take her to the big hospital in town.'

I enquired of Mirawong whether Lopor got back his girl-friend, to be told that, 'When girl go mad for Djarada business it was proper danger to take them back to country . . . then Maran been give plenty present to take back country and everybody happy.'

'And Lumberlili?' I questioned.

Old Mirawong sighed heavily at my foolish questions but answered politely: 'Him all time boss-man for devil's blood. Everywhere him get plenty tucker and girl-friend. Can't lose with that devil's blood, with it must be good hunting-man, like that one Numeuk who with his brother killed the geese women.'

The old man's voice trailed away as he picked up the little native girl who was sitting beside him, and hoisting her across his shoulders he added, 'Nother day I tell you good story about that Numeuk, how him too-much want pretty girl and that girl's mother gave him proper trick. Numeuk story long one but all time we blackfellows like hear about that yarn.'

With those final words he gathered up the portions of honey that were left over. Bidding me a 'marmuk' he moved away through the bush and the last I saw of them was the farewell gesture of the little native girl on his shoulders as they entered some flowering wattle-trees on the sandy beach nearby.

A few days later I found old Mirawong sitting under one of the yellow flowering hibiscus bushes that grow prolifically along the sandy beaches. A newly laid sea-turtle's nest at the end of two sets of turtle tracks leading from and back to the salt water explained clearly that the creature had come up during the night to lay its eggs. Sitting beside the newly dug-out nest beside a pile of white round eggs I watched the old man prick a hole in each as he put them on some of the hot ashes of a newly-made fire.

I asked him why the hole? But before he could answer a small lad, who was with him, replied. 'Suppose no hole in egg. . . . Bang! Nothing egg . . . that easy.'

Smiling at the lad's reply, Mirawong nodded towards him and remarked, 'One time he been cook turtle-egg that got no hole and it been blow up . . . that's how him learn.'

'Same way as white kiddie,' I replied.

At that moment some ducks flew rapidly along the beach and at the sight of them the old black man remarked, 'That bird make me think about Numeuk and that story that I been promise longa you.' He lapsed into silence for a while as he ate one of the cooked turtle-eggs then began his story:

'That Nymeuk was right, by blackfellow law, for a sweet-one (pretty) girl called Mardinya whose father Kunduk was a rubbish-one hunting man. But that Kunduk and his wife Beminin were too cunning-lazy and all time pull-out tucker from Numeuk, and with mouth-one-way (two-faced) they all time tell him that when their girl grow up then she will hunt tucker for him right way.'

Mirawong's tale went on to tell how Numeuk the hunter gathered in large quantities of food, but this only made the couple more greedy, and cunningly they told him that Mardinya would be his as soon as she passed her puberty ritual.

'Two rain-times passed by,' explained Mirawong, 'and, although Mardinya had passed through her pubic ritual they still made so many excuses that the tribal elders began openly to accuse Kunduk of holding the girl as his own wife. So, fearing the wrath of the tribe in relation to that incest taboo, he replied to Numeuk's request for the girl Mardinya.

"Bring us a big feast of whistling-ducks old man, and then the girl shall be yours."

But knowing it was not the season for the whistling-ducks Numeuk answered, 'Where is the place that I can find those birds at this time of the year. Are you a fool, Kunduk?' And at those words Kunduk replied cunningly, 'I know of such a place Numeuk, and tomorrow my wife and I will show that spot to you.'

'But everything was just trick business,' Mirawong added, 'that

two fellow Kunduk and Beminin had that day called on the old goose-woman who was proper angry at Numeuk crocodile-man and she gave them a magic song that would give the great hunter a trick.'

"Go," she told them as she gave them the chant, "Go to the lake of Windaramal where the Wauuluk girl danced in her puberty ritual before the great rainbow-serpent who was horrified and would destroy her as one who would profane such a taboo place. Our ritual dancers" she further informed them, "still show to the initiated of the tribe how the angry serpent swayed away as she danced, yet moved in to attack her as she became exhausted. But the serpent won," she added triumphantly, "when the dancing maiden fell asleep and sweeping as a great whirl-wind monster it swallowed her and her clan, and full and contented it disappeared into the earth as the lake of Windaramal appeared to show to all that the laws of the tribe must be faithfully obeyed."

"Beside that lake," she continued, "is a large banyan-tree, and beyond it, sun-rise-way, go till you come to a plain covered with the dried 'Munma' of those who perished by the serpent, and at that spot you will chant my magic-song and do as its magic tells you."

'So two-fellow Kunduk and his wife went to that lake,' explained Mirawong, 'and there they been sing Goose-woman's song, and straight away that "Munma" changed into whistling-ducks that called out loud fellow from that gammon reed-place . . .'

After carefully laying their trap, Kunduk and his wife sought out Numeuk the next day and told him about the new water-hole they had discovered that was 'full up fat one bird' and, although the great hunter doubted them and explained at great length that he had never heard of such an amazing thing, he nevertheless asked them to take him to the place so that he could kill many ducks and thus claim his wife Mardinya. And joyful at his words they led the hunter to the magic spot and hearing the whistling of the birds as they approached, Numeuk shook with excitement as he prepared his goose-throwing sticks for the hunt.

But a word from Kunduk made him pause in the gathering of the goose-sticks, and looking up at the cunning father of Mardinya he was told 'not to be a fool with his throwing-sticks, for he and his wife had learnt a new way that would capture many of the birds at the one time'. Enquiring about the new way Numeuk was shown a long light pole, and placing this in his hands, Kunduk explained that he and his wife would take hold of the hunter's legs and arms, and sneaking up they would toss him and his stick into the middle of the birds and, taken by surprise, Numeuk would be able to kill many before they flew away.

'Numeuk been fool to listen,' angrily commented Mirawong, 'so he laid down on the ground, as the old couple told him to do, and, when him sing out "Right!" they been chuck him no-more-little-bit longa that big mob "Munma-duck" . . . terrible . . . that place proper stinking one.'

As Numeuk's body fell amidst the vile-smelling magic ducks he realized that Kunduk had played him a 'trick'. Hastily getting to his feet he ran vomiting from the accursed place, and as he fled he heard Kunduk calling that Mardinya was his if he could entice her away.

But Numeuk was ashamed of the smell that clung to his body. He dived into many waters and each in its turn became the stinking lagoons of the land. As he approached the camps of his people the smell that preceded him was so powerful that his friends ordered him away, so, lonely and weary, with Mardinya following some distance behind as Kunduk had bidden her to do, he ever wandered around in the hunt and listened in dismay to his wife's cry of, 'Give me food Numeuk for I am hungry.'

So the aggrieved hunter went his way. He still gathered up large quantities of bush-food, and hearing Mardinya's cries he would leave a large portion of it on a stone or fallen tree, and this she would gather up when he had moved a great distance away from her. And gathering it the hunter noticed that she always carried some back to her parents, who ever hid themselves in the bush away from Numeuk's gaze.

'They been give that Numeuk proper-trick,' explained Mirawong. 'Blackfellow law say that he can't make trouble with that Kunduk over Mardinya because that robber-one been hand out him girl as he been promise to, and Numeuk still give tucker because he too-much like him wife and think me-self that "must be that smell go away some time and everything right".'

Further information regarding kinship-law revealed that when a girl, such as Mardinya, was born, her mother would tie a piece of string or spider-web around the baby's index-finger, at the first joint. This, preventing the blood from flowing, would cause the finger-joint to wither. When it dropped off, the mother's brother would wrap this in a piece of paper-bark and string. He would then give the token to that baby's intended tribal husband, who would keep it in a grass bag around his neck.

By giving and accepting that token Beminin's brother had made a vow that Numeuk would be the husband of that child, and, in accepting, Numeuk had vowed that he would feed and maintain that child's parents until the girl was old enough to sleep beside his camp-fire and care for him in his declining years.

'All-a-same whitefellow when him put money in bank for when him old fellow,' explained Mirawong.

I then asked him what would happen if Kunduk and Beminin backed out of the deal and refused to hand over the girl? Laughing at my ignorance he replied, 'Can't do it . . . too fright. Numeuk all time keep that girl finger like whitefellow keep receipt. . . . Suppose they give him trick that way then him sing and burn that dilly-bag that hold finger-bone and that girl she die right away. Blackfellow law right and full up danger.'

So Numeuk hunted as was tribal fashion and Mardinya trailed behind, with her parents, to claim the food that was their portion of the hunt.

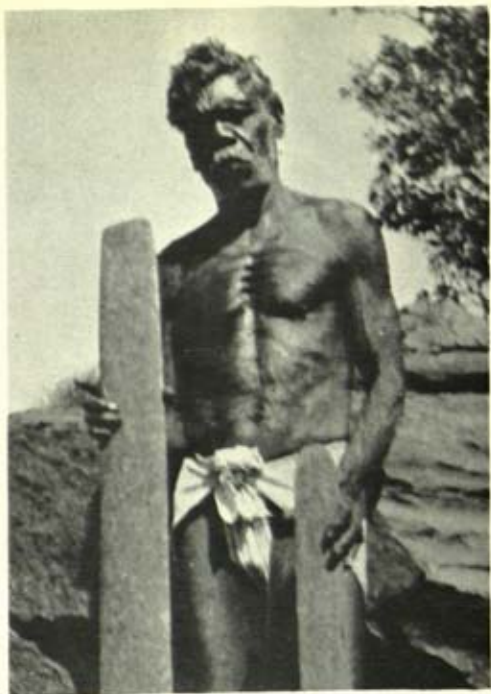
Then one hot humid day old Kunduk and Beminin remained behind to gather goose-eggs at a big lagoon and Numeuk and Mardinya hunted in the heavy timbered country of the dry-lands to search for the fat bandicoots that abounded in that land of the tall woolly-butt and messmate-trees. Patiently they searched the earth for the telltale trails of these small creatures that lived by day in the fallen hollow trunks of the trees, till at last their labours were rewarded when Numeuk saw where a large one had entered a hollow log that lay upon the ground. Calling on Mardinya to stand at one end to block its escape, he carefully felt the hollow with a long thin pole, pausing now and then as he touched something soft within; then he would twirl the pole around in the hope that its fur would become entangled amidst the jagged ends of the pole and this enable him to pull it out without cutting a hole in the fallen tree.

Three times he twirled the stick on the creature's body without results until, at last, in despair, he got down on his hands and knees to peer through the straight hollow tree-trunk. And, looking as through a window, Numeuk beheld Mardinya squatting with legs apart at the far end, and great was his rage when he saw that she was no longer a maiden, but one who had been deflowered as was the custom of the tribes, and noticing this, Numeuk remembered seeing her footprints following those of his tribal brother and every now and then putting her footprint over the trail, as is the fashion of the women when they wish to claim a sweetheart in the tribe.

'That Numeuk get proper mad now when he think about that bad trick,' remarked Mirawong as he gathered up some of the cooked turtle eggs into a heap of grass and tied it into a bundle with a piece of green beach-vine in readiness to move off to his camp. 'Him can't understand all this bad business, so he think to himself, "Must be I got to make everything level . . . proper right way."'

Seeing he was anxious to go, yet too polite to leave me, I invited him to come up to my camp later in the day, and that evening, just

(Right) Kununjun the Wad-daman aboriginal told me the story of Cananda. He is holding the sacred bull-roarers of his tribe. (See "The Lightning Brothers")

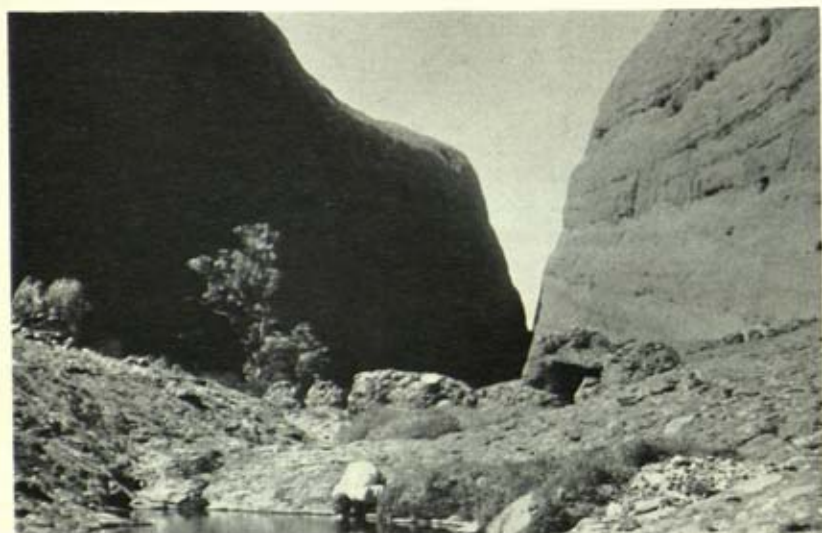


(Below) Rock paintings cover the cave walls in the place where the two brothers fought for the love of Cananda. (See "The Lightning Brothers")





Minyinderri the Windralga (mulga-seed) man, with his wife Bulya. He told me the story of Pungalung (See "Pungalung and the Mice-Women")



By the bones of Pungalung Minyinderri drank from the sacred pool of the rock carvings (See "Pungalung and the Mice-Women")

as I was boiling the billy-can for the usual drink of tea, I heard a low cough, which is the usual bush signal, be they black or white person. So I asked him to come in, and as he sipped at the tasty brew he told me that he 'been come up tell more story about Numeuk and how he made everything level with that Two-fellow-rubbish-ones Kunduk and him wife Beminin'.

'That Numeuk been get proper dry-nose (cunning) for that two-fellow Kunduk and Beminin who been treat him rubbish-way,' Mirawong began as he made himself comfortable in my camp. 'All day him keep two-fellow-trick in him binji . . . can't lose it.'

Day followed day as Numeuk hunted with Mardinya coming up behind and ever crying, 'All-a-same cockatoo for tucker, but she can't sleep longa that old man's camp in night-time.'

Then one day Numeuk came upon a strange tree that droned aloud as he stood beneath it, and looking at it he knew that this was the dreaming-tree of the bees, and the bees' nest within its limbs was full of a magic that would do his bidding. Carefully he examined the tree for the exact place to cut out the honey. He knew from the legends that had been told to him by the elders that death came to those who accidentally cut at the wrong place in this magic tree. Then just as he was despairing he beheld against the sky-line far above him, the silvery sheen of the bush-bees as they danced as a cloud above his head.

As he could not cut steps into the trunk of the taboo tree as was the custom of the hunters, he cut down a young sapling, and using this as a stiffened piece of rope, he bent it around the giant to grip each end with his hands, and with this he climbed high up into the overhead branches. Carefully he tapped with his finger-nails along the limbs of the tree, until he came to the one that gave out a hollow sound. This he cut off and after watching it fall to the earth he climbed down and chanted a song of sweetness into the honey.

'That sugar-bag (bees' nest) was proper fat one,' learnedly observed Mirawong, 'and it was too sweet.'

Carefully Numeuk cut a small slab of wood from the honey-limb and opening it up, 'all-a-same lid longa whitefellow box', he carefully scooped out a portion of the honeycomb with a flat chip of wood into a newly cut wooden bowl, and this he carried to a distant place, where he sat down to watch Mardinya eat what was left in the tree.

And as Mardinya ate up her portion of the magic honey its sweetness gave her so great a thirst that she cried frantically to Numeuk that he find water to overcome the fire within her, and smiling and satisfied at her cries the great hunter led her to a tor-like hill that stood like a massive tree, above the forest where they

hunted. Disregarding her frantic cries Numeuk cut down a small tree with a fork at one end, and placing this against the smooth cliff-face of the hill he bade her climb and drink of the water that could be found in a small rock-pool on the hill crest.

'Trick for trick . . . that blackfellow law,' explained Mirawong. 'That Numeuk him only gammon . . . nothing water longa top.'

When Mardinya reached the crest of the hill and went off to seek the non-existent water, Numeuk tossed the climbing pole to the ground. As it fell to the earth with a crash the unfortunate girl above called loudly for help, and at her cries the old hunter replied as he walked away with the rest of the magic honey in its wooden dish: 'Two-fellow level . . . trick for trick.'

Next day Numeuk returned to the hill-prison of his wife and cast a stone on to its crest. As it fell he heard her cry for help, and hearing her voice his 'belly became a stone' as he walked away into the bush to his camp beside a lagoon of sweet-tasting water.

On the third day of Numeuk's return to the hill he heard no answering cry as he cast his stone on to its crest, and looking up he could see many flies arise like a swarm of bees from the dead girl's body. With that sign of death he once more placed the forked pole against the cliff-wall of the hill, and climbing as did Mardinya on to its crest, he cut the hair from the dead one's head and this he carried back to his camp.

Numeuk knew that tribal custom demanded that he must remove this hair and return it to her parents as a sign of death, and on receiving this by a special messenger the nearest kin will 'become sorry' and make ready for the death rituals of gathering and crying over the bones in preparation for the final ceremony of 'laying the dead one's shade'.

But that cunning hunter must get even on that Kunduk and Beminin that gave him the 'trick'. Carefully he cut that dead girl's hair into small pieces and this he mixed with the remainder of the magic honey in his wooden dish. Returning to the camp of the old couple he handed it over and they were loud in their praise and remarked, as they took it from his hands, that he was now clean of the smell that had been cast upon him.

So Numeuk left them to their greed, remarking as he moved away that he must go back to their girl who was awaiting him in his camp. As he disappeared out of sight they hastily began to eat of the tasty dish, but in their eagerness they failed to notice the trap that Numeuk had prepared and only when Beminin pulled an extra long hair from her mouth did they know that their girl was dead and terrible was the revenge of their son-in-law.

Now Kunduk was great in his wrath. Quickly he lit a fire of

dried branches and as it blazed fiercely he cast a large green bush upon the flames so that a white smoke arose into the air. Many times did he repeat the placing and removing of the green bush, and watching these strange puffs of smoke rise into the sky, the tribesmen around knew that this was no ordinary bush-fire but one that had been made by someone who wished to attract attention. Heeding the sign, they came into the camp of the bereaved couple and great was their sorrow for the dead woman.

They followed Numeuk's footprints back to where his tracks came to the top of rocks, and climbing it, as did the old hunter, they wailed the louder as they gathered up the bones of the dead woman. Carefully they gathered the bones to see that none had been taken away to be used for magical purposes. Rubbing red ochre on them as is demanded by tribal custom, they rolled them up in a shroud of paper-bark and returned to the main camp, where Kunduk and Bemnin awaited with white-ochred bodies to mourn aloud as the ceremonial bone-gatherers danced towards their camp-fire.

For many days the old men of the tribe held a council of inquest over the bones, and when they had heard all the evidence they gave their judgement to the assembled people.

'Kunduk and Bemnin were in the wrong to give a great hunter like Numeuk a magic trick . . . trick for trick is the law . . . all is level now and nobody is wrong.'

But Kunduk had a son who was a friend of Numeuk's brother, and hearing the verdict he replied. 'By magic trick my poor sister died and by magic trick Numeuk must die too . . . can't stop magic.'

As he spoke a great sadness came over all. They were sorry for the great hunter who had given much food to the old people over the past years and sorrowing they watched Kunduk's son Mamru walk into the bush, following the trail of the great hunter who had destroyed his sister.

Mamru could see by the way Numeuk's tracks went in a straight line towards sundown that he was leaving his tribal country forever. Here and there he could see, by the hunter's footprints, where he had paused to throw a spear, what food he had killed; and he noted with amazement that the hunter rarely missed, for he was a noted spear-thrower and a terrible antagonist to be up against in ritual fighting.

But Mamru heeded not these signs; he had no fear of the man he was trailing, for in a grass bag which he carried around his neck was a talisman of three small magic stones that had been given to him by his uncle before he departed, and always guarded by these sacred charms the young man chanted happily as he went his way.

Everywhere Numeuk went, Mamru followed. At each bush-shade, under which the old hunter slept during the heat of the day, the young man struck with his spear, and by watching carefully the number of dried leaves that tumbled down under the impact of the blow, he could tell how near he was to his sister's murderer.

Numeuk's tracks came to a large salt-water river, thick with crocodiles, and some natives who were camping at that spot told Mamru that the one he was trailing had crossed the wide tidal river by walking and swimming along its bottom to stir up the mud, so that the savage reptiles could not smell or see him as he went along. 'Now and then,' they further informed him, 'that Numeuk would rise to the surface for air just as the crocodiles do, and swimming along the waters he would wait until the hunting creatures came near; then down he would go once more and continue on his way till the other side of the stream was reached.'

'Your Numeuk is a great hunter,' the river-men told Mamru as they helped him build a raft of paper-bark and dried pandanus poles so that he could cross over. 'Whilst here with us he caught a crocodile by creeping upon it as the creature slept, and seizing it by the tail, as one would do a water goanna, he had dashed the reptile to death upon the hard earth.'

At their words in praise of Numeuk the young Mamru became afraid, but fingering the grass bag that carried his charms, the fear within him departed and in its place he felt a great hatred.

So Mamru crossed the river of the crocodiles and came out into a big swamp-plain covered with wild-fowl. His path led towards a big lily-covered lagoon and beside the trail he came upon a camp of swamp-dwellers who lived in bark mosquito-houses that stood on long poles around a smoky fire, and these people warned him of the danger that lay ahead.

Mamru asked after Numeuk, and an old man explained how the old hunter's trail led by the lagoons of the Rainbow-serpents that are the offspring of captured native girls and crocodile fathers. 'Ugly are they, my boy . . . you will see their heads in the sky as whirlwinds in the dry-time and savage legs-of-rain in the storms, and all are waiting to pounce upon the strangers and destroy them.'

'How then shall I pass by?' cried Mamru in despair, to which the other replied, 'Do as Numeuk did . . . his body was covered with the red ochre which he had dug up from the womb-cave of the Earth-Mother . . . the Rainbows cannot touch those who are painted thus.'

So Mamru retraced his steps, eagerly watching for the side-trail by which Numeuk went to the red-ochre place, and before long, on a piece of wind-blown ground, he saw the tell-tale mark of a

disturbed leaf that showed him the secret way to the Earth-Mother's cave.

And as he approached the cave place he met an old man—who, as the Head-man of the red-ochre cave—asked him his business, and Mamru replied as he handed over some reed-spears he was carrying, 'As a stranger to this land I wish to pay tribute to you for protection against the evil spirits that could destroy me. By magic was my sister killed and now I am following the tracks of he who destroyed her.'

'Beware of Numeuk,' replied the old man as he blind-folded the young man and led him to the secret cave where he rubbed him with its red ochre. 'He is a great hunter and beloved by the crocodile people.'

But Mamru laughed aloud as he bid the elder farewell, and crossing the wide swamp-lands he beheld the sky-rainbows swaying and retreating as he advanced. He passed by the sacred lagoon of the crocodile-people and hearing sweet chants which he knew came from the enchanted water-girls who lived amidst the blue and white lilies, he closed his ears with chewed-up grass, and chanting a song of fire he taunted the Yunggamurras who dared to make his 'flesh like water' and so lure him to a terrible death in their crab-like embrace.

So Mamru passed by the rainbow-land in safety, noticing as he did that the bush shade-shelters built by Numeuk cast fewer leaves on to the ground under the impact of his spear, and elated that he would soon come face to face with his sister's murderer he chanted the Emu-chant of endurance as he came to a place of high hills and steep-sided valleys.

At a water-hole before he reached the cliff-faced mountain he met another old man, who told him that he had seen Numeuk but a few days before and he was then entering the valley of rock-pythons with a cone-like paper-bark hat on his head. To the young man's questions about the python-place the other replied:

'Your Numeuk is a great hunter,' warned the old man. 'The bravest of our tribe are afraid of the dreaded monsters in those rocky valleys, but should you wish to go on then I warn you to do as he did, for he had a reason when he put on the paper-bark head-covering.'

Heeding the old man's words Mamru stripped a sheet of bark from a paper-bark-tree beside the water-hole and this he made into a cone-like hat well tied with bush string. With this on his head, and looking like one of the ritual dancers of his tribe, he wended his way into the dreaded valley of the rock-pythons.

High on each side of him, as he travelled, he saw the polished

rocks that had been worn smooth by rock wallabies, and on the ledges he noted, with fear, large droppings that must have been made by the dreaded pythons. Everywhere he heard hissing and the clattering of boulders, and just as he saw an opening in the chasm that led to the big plain beyond he heard loud hissing above him as a giant serpent struck at his head in the manner of these creatures as they capture their prey.

And as Mamru felt the weight of the python's jaws pressing upon his head he fell to his knees so that the paper-bark hat remained fast in the creature's teeth and jaws, and as the reptile tried to shake it loose, the frightened man sped down the narrow defile to the open plain below.

Shaking with fear, yet overjoyed at his escape, Mamru sat in the shade of an iron-wood tree to regain his senses, then moving around in a wide circle, he soon cut Numeuk's trail and was once more on his way, camping and hitting the bushes of the other's camp, and knowing by the amount of falling leaves the number of days since his passing.

Then came that day when he beat at a fresh green shade-shelter and no leaves fell upon the earth. Knowing that here was the end of his long outward trail Mamru looked around, to see a thin wisp of smoke coming from a rocky shelter nearby, and as he looked the voice of Numeuk hailed him with the question as to why he had followed his trail.

'I have followed you, old man,' the other replied, 'to let you know that the people of our tribe are proper sorry for the trick given to you by my parents . . . and now they wish you to return to the hunting grounds that you know so well.'

'Numeuk all day fool and listen-listen anybody when they talk-talk wrong way,' explained Mirawong. 'Soft words made him into a cranky fool.'

But at Mamru's words a great longing for his tribal lands came upon Numeuk, and, handing over to the young man a portion of some wallaby that he had killed and cooked that day, he remarked, 'Tomorrow we two will go back to our country . . . tonight we will sleep in the cave.'

But that night Mamru lay down at the entrance of the cave in which the old man slept, and when he heard deep breathing from within he arose and took from the grass bag around his neck the small magic stones. These he placed in a row at the entrance of the cave, chanting as he did a song of magic that caused the pebbles to grow until they sealed up the mouth of that cave, which became the tomb of Numeuk the hunter, who, awakened by the grinding noises as the three stones pressed against the roof and sides of his prison,

called wildly for Mamru to release him. But the youthful hunter only laughed aloud at his cries and listening to the laughter, old Numeuk heard faintly in the distance the chanting of Mamru as he walked into the sun-rise back to his tribal lands.

As Mirawong finished his lengthy tale both he and I looked into the bush country beyond as we sipped at our pannikins of tea. From the aboriginal camps came loud laughter, then discordant cries as a pack of dogs began a yelping chorus ending in a combined wailing that had the natives belting into them with sticks, tins and stones. As the noise died away my old story-telling black-friend remarked, 'All day me proper sorry for that Numeuk, and one time when I was riding horse in cattle country sun-down way one of the stockmen of that cattle-station showed me the hill that became the prison of the great hunter. That blackfellow been give me good story of that Numeuk, and my father also told me the tale different way . . . I been get story from everywhere and from little pieces I give you the tale as it should be told.'

'Proper true story?' I questioned him, and he indignantly replied, 'Proper true one story. . . . That lagoon where girl dance for Rainbow and where Kunduk make stinking one ducks, you white people call Lake Dean. That big river is Daly river way. Rainbow place is on Moil plain. Everything right in story, can't lose anything.'

With those final words old Mirawong rose to his feet, and after taking the kinks out of his back by bending from side to side, he bade me farewell and moved off down the track towards his firelit camp amidst the trees.

## GOD-MAN WAY

Mission-man . . . me . . . we go longa boat,  
Boat sink down and we two fellow float  
On to the shore where we sleep like dead,  
Then we two-fellow wake and that God-man said.

'Which way tucker?' and I say, 'Him here,'  
And there longa beach I make bush-spear,  
Then I go billabong where grass grows tall  
And I throw my spear and down goose fall.

Then white-boss say, 'God send fire we,'  
So I make big fire from fire-stick tree,  
Then I cook that tucker and more him say,  
'No more eat till to God we pray.'

So we pray longa God and we eat that food,  
Then Mission-man talk-talk, 'God is good  
Sit longa top-side, this is true  
God send mission-man take care you.'

So I think meself, 'This man tell lie,'  
So I make smoke-sign that goes longa sky;  
And blackmen come as the sea-winds blew,  
And we all thanked God for that big canoe.

Then we all sail back to that mission place  
And there longa church we say big grace  
As he gave us flour and sugar and tea,  
And him talk-talk something 'Mystery'.

So I talk-talk God-man, 'What what about boat?  
Suppose God mind we, why no float?'  
'You just like child,' him smile and say,  
'God him do things . . . different way.'

## Chapter 6

### THE LIGHTNING BROTHERS

OLD KUNUNJUN of the Waddamam tribe and I sat under a ledge of rock beside the hill of Wahdohi that stands about six miles northward of Delemere cattle station in the Northern Territory.

I had walked that distance with the old aborigine to see the paintings of the Gecko Lightning brothers and to hear, from him, at this renowned totemic centre, the story about the origin of rain.

The walk had been a pleasant one in the cool winter's morning, and once settled in beneath the hill, the old man was pointing out to me the crude etchings on the stone walls and explaining that—according to native mythology—the first paintings were made in the creative period, and ever since they had been retraced by the local song-man as part of a ceremony that produced rain in this area.

The ochred paintings I looked at were on a rough stone-face, sheltered by a larger slab of stone that had tipped over the entrance, and peering into the dim shadows I could discern the rough outline of a figure about seven feet high with a smaller one standing beside it. The body and legs of the figures were as one, and these were made up of white and red perpendicular lines that were said to represent the falling rain. The heads of the two resembled that of a gecko lizard, and asking Kununjun for an explanation he informed me that, as these creatures were capable of walking upside down because of the sucker-like pads on their feet, they were naturally the totemic heroes who strode over the heavens, and with magic boomerangs, they were the ones who made the lightning of the storm-time.

'No good ask about more,' came testily from my friend as I was about to question him further on the subject. 'More better you hear story first time then you will understand everything properly way.' And at that rebuke I just listened patiently as he told his story.

'Long time ago when we all about were as nothing, two brothers of the Gecko totem lived in 'nother one country sun-down way.'

The eldest one, he explained, was a man with the age group of 'Marlu', their tribal term for a man who had been subincised, and the younger one was in the Yaba or circumcised group that denoted he had never passed into a ritual life that gave him the status of his eldest brother.

Now one day Yaba was hunting wallaby along a pleasant valley called Bamberin, which is today the river bed of the mighty Victoria River that rises on the tablelands of the desert Korindji tribe and enters the Timor Sea to the westward of Darwin.

'Big lightning painting at Bamberin,' remarked Kununjun, 'proper big one at that place where this Yaba been first hunt wallaby.' I nodded in reply, for I had already seen those massive reclining figures on a cliff wall of jasper high above the pandanus-lined river. So my story-teller continued.

As Yaba hunted for his prey he was halted by the sight of female footprints on the soft red earth and immediately knew them as the tracks of two young girls who always hunted outside the tribal law in this locality. Often had he heard about the beautiful Cananda of the black-cockatoo totem and those who had seen her were for ever afterwards seeking for the correct magic sex-songs so as to entice her to their camp-fire.

And as Yaba looked at the footprints he heard the long river-grass rattle amidst the white gum-trees, and looking in that direction he saw Cananda and her sister Kudjerdi speed across a river flat and race towards the high hills nearby.

Like a spinifex-pigeon Yaba was speeding behind them, but they beat him to a cave with a narrow entrance, and there they hid and laughed at his efforts to entice them out.

For a long time Yaba sat beside the cave entrance. Each time he thrust a long thin stick into the hole in an endeavour to scare them out they laughed aloud and spat upon the end, so, driven to despair, he returned empty-handed to Marlu's camp-fire. He was busy on his arrival with the cooking of a fat juicy emu on the coals of the camp-fire.

'That Yaba proper hungry,' explained Kununjun, 'so him say to that one Marlu cunning way, "Brother if you give me meat with fat on it I will tell you a good story".'

So Marlu handed over a portion of the breast-bone, heavy with fat and meat, and receiving it, Yaba told him about his adventures with the two girls on the river flat and hearing the news the elder brother went to the place of the two girls, to suffer defeat and despair as the girls laughed him away from their sheltered cave-home.

'But that Marlu was cunning,' remarked Kununjun. 'Him go

back longa camp and told Yaba that he saw nothing'; and accusing his brother of taking his fat meat by lies, he demanded that he return to the valley next day and capture the two women.

So next day Yaba went once more to the valley of the two young women, and unbeknown to him the wily Marlu had sped to the cave entrance and awaited there for the girls to come his way when they were chased by his younger brother. . . .

As he was telling me the story Kununjun sighted some green bushes that grew under an overhanging ledge of rock, and gathering them up he explained that they were the native 'Wolaria'. 'Proper good tobacco all-a-same white-man's stuff longa store. . . . Me keep it,' he informed me as he rolled it into small bundles; then putting it in a shady spot beside him he went on with the story.

'Well that Yaba find girls all right and when they race to cave that cunning one Marlu been jump out from where he hide in cave mouth and straight away he catch that two girl . . . one longa each hand and no matter they sing out loud fellow him hold them strong-fellow-way.'

Along came the exhausted Yaba, and beholding his brother with the girls, he immediately claimed Cananda as his by the native law that gave a captive to the one who first saw their footprints on the earth, but Marlu rebuked him with a warning that he was too immature for a young girl and countered his claim by another tribal law that, 'Youth must mate with age; experience with inexperience.'

So Marlu returned to his camp-fire with his captured wives, and as Yaba came up in the rear he 'been think about good trick to beat that robbing brother Marlu', commented Kununjun as he lit a small fire at the entrance of our stone shelter and began to sort out the varying sizes of his Wolaria bush as part of the preparation of converting it into an aboriginal tobacco-chew called 'Warnu' or 'Marbardj'.

With bitterness in his heart Yaba hunted alone throughout the bush until that day when he met a very old man, who hailed him and remarked that, 'Young men were fools who wandered alone,' then, questioningly, he asked the young man the whereabouts of Marlu.

To the old man's question Yaba told of how his brother had 'given him a trick', and hearing him out the old man replied:

'I am Badju, head-man of Yerindi. With my magic Yerindi-songs I can make dead trees and stones come alive with shade-spirits, and when they are as that, they will do my bidding. I am he who throws a magic Yerindi-stone with my hair-belt sling and guided by my songs it can pursue the runaway girl and so cause her to

die under that falling-star. I am he who can transform the unborn babe of a woman's womb into stone and so cause both to die. . . . Watch!

'That Yaba been watch all-right,' laughingly from Kununjun. 'His eyes close up jump out from fright when he see a cheeky one snake come out from that old man's mouth, and he think-think himself, "This Badju proper danger man . . . more better me look out," then easy-way he talk-talk to that Badju. "More better you help me."' "

A silence brooded over us as Kununjun picked up the green Wolaria bushes and held them over the small fire to dry them out. Then he burnt some *junba* bushes into a white ash, and mixing the lot with his spittle he stuffed the quid into his mouth and began to chew, and chewing he looked over my way and remarked, 'This "warnu" proper good . . . when I chew it my body just like feather longa wind.'

I nodded and waited patiently, and after a time came the rest of the story . . . .

At Yaba's request old Badju gave the young man a small white stone that had been made Yerindi with one of the old man's magic songs, and as he handed it over the old man told the youth to place it in the fork of a small casuarina tree that grew beside a river. Doing as he was told, Yaba placed the magic stone amid some of the small branches and instantly it was transformed into an eagle's nest carrying nice fat eaglets.

Rejoicing at this wonderful thing, Yaba returned to his brother to learn that the girl Kudjerdi had run away back to the bush and only Cananda remained.

On hearing the news Yaba once more asked his brother for a payment of meat and fat for a good story, and after the deal was made he took the couple to the Yerindi-tree and pointing to the eagle's nest upon it he remarked, 'I am too young to eat the fat meat of the eaglets so I give them to you.'

Overjoyed at the gift Marlu climbed the tree and as he looked down upon the nest he cried aloud with despair as the magic tree suddenly grew upwards until its branches reached the clouds above. Fearful that he might fall he called loudly for Yaba to come to his aid, but the other only laughed as he and Cananda sped into the bush and away from that place of magic.

'Long time that Marlu been sit down longa that Yerindi-tree, can't get down for it was too high.'

So the days went by, with Marlu growing weaker as he clung to the swaying limbs of the slender tree. In despair he called loudly for his totems to come and assist him. At last a great wind blew, and

this caused the slim tree to bend over; as it neared the ground the weakened man fell down as lightly as a feather upon a soft green bush that arose to break his fall.

'That Marlu been crawl around for long time and eat nothing but grasshopper, grubs and little-fellow lizard,' commented Kununjun. 'Him weak all-a-same water, but when he get little-bit strong then he went out and hunted heavy tucker that made him good, and when proper strong he went in search of that two-fellow.'

Eagerly he searched the ground to try and pick up the trails of the culprits, but the wind that had rescued him from the Yerindi-tree had swept out their tracks, and just as he was despairing, a raucous voice called his name. Looking up into a dry tree he saw a black crow that spoke once more as he gazed upon it in astonishment.

'The people you are seeking,' it told him, 'went by my roosting-tree in the hills . . . they were going sun-rise-way and I heard Yaba chanting a song of Yerindi as he went by with your wife Cananda. Do not go that way for it is full of danger.'

And hearing this, Marlu went out on to a wide plain, and hunting there he saw a plain-kangaroo that called his name as he was stalking it. Marlu lowered his spear in surprise and the marsuipal remarked, 'Do not be afraid of me for I am Wolajaru. I was once a human being the same as you. In the dream-time I made the boomerang which cut down the trees when I threw it and so made these plains. I am immortal.' Then reaching down into the grass he picked up a wooden boomerang, and handing this to Marlu he said, 'You have been wronged so I will help you. Take that boomerang, and as you go into sun-rise-way always cast it ahead of you as you go through the heavy scrublands and see what happens.'

So Marlu took up the magic boomerang, and rubbing red ochre upon his forehead as Wolajaru had bidden him do, he chanted a new song as he moved across the plain that stretched into sun-rise-way.

Coming to the heavy timber-lands, Marlu heeded the kangaroo's words and, throwing his boomerang over the timber before him, he marvelled at the way the trees fell beneath its flight to make a clear passage for its owner, and, seeing this, Marlu chanted the louder as he travelled across the plains he had made.

And travelling thus, Marlu came to the land of the Karee blue-tongued lizard, who angrily demanded why all this noise in his peaceful country. To him Marlu answered, 'I seek my brother Yaba who gave me a trick then ran away with my wife Cananda.' Hearing his words Karee replied, 'Yaba has the magic of Yerindi. He is on his way to the rain-country of the Frog-men, which is a

land heavy with rain clouds and fog. Turn back, you fool, for ahead is danger.'

Then Marlu laughed aloud as he replied, 'Yaba has magic Yerindi, but I have a buran (boomerang) that will seek and destroy him,' and saying those words Marlu cast his magic weapon around, and as it sped in a circle so were the plains of that area formed. As it went on its way Karee ran into a crack in the earth, and emerging after the noise had subsided he shouted angrily at the intruder.

'Your magic buran is only a seeker of people and a maker of trails . . . you are but a fool . . . take this,' he cried as he tossed to Marlu a well-cut coarri wooden shield. 'This is a magic shield that will protect you should someone sing yerindi magic into your buran and make it return to destroy you.'

Marlu picked up the light wooden shield that Karee had flung at his feet and, bidding the lizard-man farewell, and, happy in the knowledge that he now possessed weapons of offence and defence, he chanted a song of happiness as he went on his way.

'That Marlu been have hard work chasing that two-fellow,' commented Kununjun, 'but that buran been mark which way those runaway ones went . . . no matter they been twist about and change around that Marlu been follow them like snake on track of bush-rat.'

From Kununjun's description the path of the runaways now turned to the north and before long it led Marlu to a land heavy with a haze that came from the angry Frog-men at Wahdohi, who had given his brother and Cananda sanctuary in their tribal lands.

'Everything proper danger now,' explained Kununjun. 'No matter Marlu frightened, him can't turn back . . . this proper dreaming business . . . suppose him turn back then no more rain and everybody dead one. . . . Every stone in this place were live people first time, and when head-man for rain in this country want to make rain then he must come here to sing rain-song and put red . . . white ochre right way on painting as he sing that song.'

I looked beyond the speaker at a low sandstone hill about two hundred yards away, and listening to Kununjun's story I pictured the scene of past days.

Marlu knew by the rain-fogs that he was at the end of his journey. Savagely he chanted his Gecko-song as he rattled his magic boomerang against his wooden shield, and in reply he heard the chants of the Frog-men that sounded like the hissing of rains in the monsoon gales.

Slowly the rain-fog lifted as would a curtain rise upon a play, and Marlu beheld his brother standing on a cleared space before

him, surrounded by his friends. Yaba shouted defiance at his brother as Marlu came in to the attack.

'You see that stone hill over there,' said my old story-teller as he became excited with the tempo of the tale. 'Well, they were one time Frog-men who saw that terrible fight and this hill of the painting was where Marlu stood when he hurled his magic buran at Yaba.'

Becoming exited at this part of the tale, old Kununjun broke away from the story form, and rubbing his hands over the cave painting he chanted for me the ancient song-cycle of rain that was connected with the paintings of this area, and as he chanted it, I, who knew that language, could picture that strange scene.

'The flight of the boomerang is like the lightning as it goes in to the attack,

Now it travels high into the cloud-stones that are being made by the Frog-men,

Cloud-stones on which the Spirit of Rain will travel to pour water upon the land below.

Everywhere the boomerang roars like thunder as it seeks out the evil ones of the tribe,

Now it comes with a roar to where Yaba stands upon the plain, As lightning flashes on to the earth so does it strike off the head of Yaba,

Now the head of Yaba rolls as a stone on to the open plain and the Frog-men are transformed into hills as the lightning boomerang goes upwards towards the crying rain-spirits above.'

Kununjun's chant died slowly away and as it did he looked foolishly at me and remarked, 'Good song that one. My father . . . dead one . . . been teach it to me . . . not right to sing that song in cold-weather-time, but I been go little-bit silly longa head and me cranky to sing it in wrong time.'

'And what about rain,' I asked him. 'Why no sing rain now?'

Old Kununjun knew that I was joking, nevertheless he replied. 'Rain can't come till head-man for rain make it from song as he put more ochre on this painting.'

'Well, what about you?' I quizzed him. 'You are the Wadda-man rain-man. Why don't you make rain?'

'When paper-bark and plum-tree have flowers and the rain-bird calls on the Frog-men to make clouds by squirting water from their mouths, then I know the rain-spirit will be listening for my song,' he replied. 'So I come here and make rain, and if that rain-spirit like my song and sees that I am doing every thing proper way then he

will send down plenty rain on this country. . . . Best rain-man gets best rain . . . that right ain't it,' he added questioningly, and I nodded agreement.

So I thanked that grey-haired elder for the story, and together he and I gazed upon that ancient cave painting of a people who once hunted on this land that is now under lease to a cattle company who employ my old friend's relatives as stockmen and domestics around their station homesteads.

PUNGALUNG AND THE MICE-WOMEN

FROM OUR resting place, on the side of Ayers Rock, the conglomerate mountains of Olga were indigo-blue against the back lighting which came from the setting sun. As a background to the picture were the red and pink tones that trailed as horse's-tails through the blue sky. Beneath us was the red scar of the winding bush road that weaved westward through the dark-green mulga-trees and the silvery spinifex.

Minyinderri of the Pitjinjarra tribe and I looked long at the changing colours. I was silent as I looked upon the natural picture, but from the low chants that came from my aboriginal companion, I could tell that he was re-calling from his subconscious mind the myths relating to the land before us.

'My country that way,' he commented nostalgically as he pointed westward, 'good place my country . . . plenty water and tucker.'

As he pointed I wondered just where this so called desert land would really become a desert. From Alice Springs, two hundred and seventy miles to Ayers Rock, the earth was covered with vegetation, and along that bush road water was supplied from the windmills and the native wells. Now here was Minyinderri telling me that beyond was 'Good country with plenty water'.

A few days later, he and I went by that bush road to the Olgas, the 'Katatjuta' or 'many heads' of the tribesmen, and on the western side, beneath a patch of mulgas where we were boiling the billy for a drink of tea, he remarked as we looked on the massive domes before us:

'You see that big mountain,' he pointed to the highest dome that stood above us for over fourteen hundred feet, 'That one we call Ngunarra, and that one,' he again pointed eastward to another large dome which nestled nearby, 'that is Wapla, and between the two is . . .' he paused awhile, then continued, 'What about you and me go and I tell you good story?'

So we two walked, scrambled and climbed into that narrow valley; on each side of us the cliff faces rose for hundreds of feet, and around us, as we went our way, were the dense groves of the twisted 'Orredjunba' (Tacoma) trees out of which the tribesmen made their 'wurumbu' hunting spear shafts.

After scrambling for a while through this water-washed ravine we came to a great mass of boulders that had broken away from the cliff face ages ago. Beckoning me to be seated beside him on one of the larger boulders that gave to us an unrestricted view of the country beyond, Minyinderri told me the tale of Pungalung and his troubles with the Minggarri mice maidens.

'Long time ago,' he began, 'a hunter called Pungalung lived in this country. He was a great hunter and the old people of my tribe, who told me the story, said that he was as big as one of these mountains. He was so tall that he carried the kangaroos he killed in the hunt by just tucking their heads under the human-hair belt around his waist, and as the people heard the thunder of his feet as he travelled, they would hide till he went by. He was feared by all, especially the women of the tribes, who were told that he was a stealer of women and a breaker of our kinship laws. . . .'

The green of a spear tree caught his eye as he spoke, so he broke off the narrative as he pulled out of his belt a sharp knife, and with this he cut off one of the vine-like limbs that grew beside us, and as he trimmed off its leaves and bark he continued with his story.

'One day they came to this place which had no mountains then, for they grew out of the story I am telling to you . . . you see there?' He pointed to some isolated domes to the eastward and away from the main mass of mountains. A nod from me that I had seen them was the signal for him to begin once more. 'Well, right there lived some young women of the Minggarri (mice totem). They were quiet women,' he continued, 'never make trouble with anyone, and knowing nothing about men they did not run away when they saw Pungalung coming.

'At that time Pungalung had a friend called Mudjera who was just the same size as us people, and seeing the camp of the mice-maidens he smacked his lips together as he made his camp close beside the young women, and then his troubles began.'

Leaving me to ponder over the fate of the mice-women, Minyinderri lit a fire on the rock beside us and as it blazed he kept putting his twisted spear-haft into the flames. As it became pliable by the steam from the wood-sap, he straightened each bend over his knee till it cooled out and remained in place. I watched with patience as he went about his trade, until, satisfied at last, he gave a final look along the now straightened haft, and then continued with his tale.

'That Pungalung get big surprise when he try "playabout" and found out that Minggarri women know nothing about man . . . they just can't understand anything,' explained Minyinderri, 'and when that happen that Pungalung get very angry and try to make

them into proper women like some people from 'nother country show him how to cut (deflower) with knife.

'Now when Pungalung do that silly thing,' continued my storyteller, 'them Minggarri women squeek-squeek no-more-little-bit and from squeek they start singing out like dingo, and when this thing happen they change themselves into savage dogs that snap with strong teeth as they attack that Pungalung and his friend Mudgera.

'Now that two men had never seen dingo before and Pungalung say to his friend. "Do not get frightened, you climb on to my back and I will kill them all as they jump at us."

'So Mudgera did as he was told and from his high place he could see that the mice-dingo women were growing larger as they came nearer. Pungalung see that thing too, and straight away he turned to run as the first of the savage dogs leapt on to his back and grabbed that poor frightened Mudgera and tossed him high up into the air so that he came down on to the red sandhills as the little red lizard that lives there today. When they do that, they wail "loud one" and scratch sand up, no-more-little-bit, as they after that Pungalung who foot-race into sun-down way.

'My word,' laughingly said Minyinderri, 'plenty time my people told me how that Pungalung made big dust as he run with that mob dingo snapping behind him . . . at one place he got long way in lead, and hearing them coming on his trail, he made a big irama boomerang and with that thing he knocked out the teeth of the snapping dingos as they leapt upon him . . . everywhere over that country where they been foot-race you can see them white stone-like teeth which us people use to make *djulus* (knives) for cutting up meat or scooping out *meli* (wooden dishes) for carrying tucker and water.'

As I had seen the flakes of this flinty chert, I nodded, and he continued, 'Well all these hills and mountains grew up out of that story. Sun-rise way is the hills of the Minggarri mice-women that became dingos. These mountains here are the heads of the people and these,' he pointed to the large boulders around us, including the one we sat upon, 'these are the bones of that Pungalung.'

'How did they get here?' I questioned.

'Well,' continued Minyinderri, 'that cranky one came back after these hills grew up, and one dark night as he was stepping from Ngunarra to Wulpa he slipped and was killed . . . good job too for he always made trouble and run after women too-much.'

Minyinderri paused awhile as he took an acacia spearhead from a small bag he carried, and trimming the end of his newly made spear-haft he fitted the hard-wood tip carefully, then bound it on

with some sinews he had removed from a kangaroo that he had killed and cooked that day. The binding completed, he heated some black spinifix wax over the fire and with this he covered the binding on the spearhead, pressing it firm from time to time with his spittle-moistened fingers. Then with it poised and at the ready to throw, he remarked. 'This good country . . . everything for spear here all-a-same white-man's store . . . only no more buy . . . everything grow here, and out there.' He pointed to some mountain peaks to the westward, 'that is the country of the stone-teeth . . . that hill there' (he pointed to a lonely peak away to the westward) 'that is where Pungalung made the big boomerang we use for the big Puppear corroboree.'

He pointed further on. 'That big mountain is *karndju* country . . . different story about an old man who hunted dream-time kangaroo with mob dingo. All them hills were made in that story. The big one is where the dingos killed and ate the kangaroo . . . they eat *karndju* too . . . everywhere story in this country . . . can't finish.'

'Can't finish.' I looked out over the so-called desert land covered with vegetation and the tales of the tribesmen.

## MIGHT BE . . . SOMEDAY

Somewhere, sometime, somebody say  
'Blackfellow sleep-sleep all the day'.  
We fellow sleep 'cause that our rule,  
Whitefellow work-work 'cause him fool.

Whitefellow talk make ear-hole crack,  
Growl longa black man 'cause him black;  
Can't growl white for that white man say,  
'Do it self,' and him walk away.

My man say, 'Can't understan'  
Why white think him clever one man,  
Can't do wrong 'cause too much white,  
Black man wrong and the white boss right.'

New fellow jackaroo come from south,  
Pretty-one shirt and talk big-mouth;  
Fight longa horse and lost all day  
Think him clever in the whitefellow way.

Properly humbug, 'nother-one kind  
Put down something . . . growl . . . can't find  
Reckon him all-day savee we,  
Talk silly-way like piccaninny.

My man talk-talk, 'Don't go mad  
Might-be some day clever one lad;  
First time new, but one day might  
Savee that blackfellow clever like white.'



PART TWO

TALES OF IMAGINATION

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THESE ABORIGINE'S stories of imagination mostly concern their personal adventures or other people's adventures with ghost-like creatures that roam the hunting areas and hover around the camp-fires, seeking to trap the evil-doers of the tribe.

These 'devil-devils'—the common name for these creatures—are with every tribe. On Melville and Bathurst Islands they are the 'Mubaditties'; around Darwin is the abode of the 'Winmalungs'. On the Macarthur River that flows into the Gulf of Carpentaria the 'Mulugoodas' are the ones that roam the land, and with the Waddaman tribe the evil one is 'Wulgaru'. Most of these titles are descriptive ones meaning 'Big-eyed' or 'Big-cap', or 'earhole'.

In ritual ceremonies and around the camp-fires the tales about these creatures are a common subject. Many of the stories are but cautionary tales to prevent children from wandering too far from a camp without permission, whilst others are for the youth of the tribe who are tempted to disobey the warnings of the elders regarding ritual matters.

The moral behind some of the stories is to explain that calmness in adversity is always best, and fear in danger always leads to disaster.

Some of the stories have been handed down from a past incident, others are modern and concern the adventures of the narrators of the tale. Each in its turn portrays the native character against a background of hunting, work and camp-life.

I have chosen to include here the stories about Wulgaru.

## Chapter 8

### HOW DJARAPA MADE WULGARU

THE WADDAMAN aborigines who lived and hunted south-east of the Katherine River chant a myth of how an enraged hero in 'Boaradja' or creative times sent a big flood from sunrise way to destroy the evil-doers who disobeyed the tribal laws. The ritual chants of the elders tell how the fleeing taboo-breakers were drowned and of how the residual hills rose above the raging waters and carried to safety the good tribespeople and the creatures of the earth who fled or swam there for protection.

'All people were happy then,' an old elder called Tulu explained to me as we sat beneath a large salmon-gum tree and ate some of the 'pandalun' sugar-leaf manna we had just gathered from the branches above our heads. 'First time everybody in our tribe were happy; happy until an old fool called Djarapa tried to make man from magic songs over wood, stone and red-ochre paint.'

Tulu went on to explain how old Djarapa cut a piece of wood from a green tree and this he trimmed to look like the body of a human being. Next he made the legs and arms from pieces of wood and for knee and arm-joints he used rounded stones that he gathered up in a river bed. After putting them together with red-ochred string he painted ears, nose and eyes in the thing and as he painted he chanted a very magic song that had been taught to him by a now dead tribal medicine-man.

'Good song-man,' said Tulu, and when I asked did he know the chant he looked horrified and explained that it was, 'proper danger song . . . suppose wrong man get that song then straight-away him kill everybody, one-time . . . all-a-same lightning.'

All day and night Djarapa chanted, and beat his tap-sticks over the lifeless bits of wood and stone. He chanted until his throat became dry and hoarse, and at last, in despair, he gathered up his hunting weapons and went his way.

And as he walked along Djarapa heard a loud clanking sound with the crashing of many trees behind him, and looking around he beheld the terrible monster of wood and stone shambling along on his trail. Its arms twisted and beat the air and he noticed that these flailing arms were the things that beat down the trees as it moved along. The creaking noises he heard came from the creature's knee-

and arm-joints, and every now and then the monster opened its mouth and snapped its jaws together with such a force that the white cockatoos that followed overhead screeched a warning to the other animals and birds of the bush. When this happened the newly created thing opened its eyes so that they blazed, 'all-a-same stars'.

'Djarapa dead-fright now when that devil-devil big-eye been come close up longa his track,' Tulu explained, 'but when Djarapa stop then that Wulgaru thing stop too and when him run then that devil-devil run too. Djarapa can't lose it.'

Trembling with fear Djarapa noticed that the thing of his creation was only following him by sight, so he leapt behind a dark-green bush, then doubling back on his trail, he stood behind a large salmon-gum tree as the shuffling monster went on, finally to enter a big lagoon. Watching that spot in amazement the terrified creator of monsters beheld it emerge from the opposite bank and move off into the jungle beyond.

'Proper fool that Djarapa. Man make devil-devil . . . now he can't kill it . . . make trouble for everybody,' bitterly commented Tulu.

So the devil-devil Wulgaru came to the Waddaman tribe and there in the big lancewood and edge-wood scrubs it wanders around to be the self-appointed judge of the dead. Let a native make a large fire by night and the guardian one of the dead will be upon them. Should children beat the camp-fires to watch the sparks fly high into the night's air, then Wulgaru is nearby. The curlew at night will always give out her screeching call when she sees, with her piercing eye, the camp of a people who do not obey the tribal laws.

'That big-cap Wulgaru is proper big-eye too,' Tulu told me. 'For good people then him good, but for bad people then he is proper cheeky one . . . him too much boss-man for dead people shade.'

And with that, Tulu and I gathered up the remains of our sugar-leaf and moved off to our camp, which was beside the spot where Djarapa made the first Wulgaru who is said still to wander around in search of the one who created him in the dream-time.

## Chapter 9

### MAHLINDJI'S RIDE WITH WULGARU

THE WEATHER was warm as Mahlindji rode his stock-horse over the red jasper hills covered with spinifix and turpentine bushes which gave a strong pungent scent into the humid air of the short-time. His job as a cattleman was to leave the station-homestead each day and 'ride the tracks'—a bush term that meant he would saddle his horse each morning and ride in a wide arc of many miles around the open range country to see that no cattle-tracks led away from the main herd. Such tracks often ended in the animals becoming strays in the desert land and dying of thirst during the dry time.

All day he had been following some cattle-tracks, but they had gradually turned back towards their own cattle-run, and, satisfied, he left them and was now riding back to the homestead some miles away. As he did so he thought of the cook-place there, with its blazing fire and grilling rib-bones from a freshly killed beast, and he knew, by the slant of the sun, that he must keep his horse moving fast to reach his destination before sundown.

Musing thus, he saw the tracks of a large goanna, and noting that it went under a big clump of spinifix, he hastily dismounted, and turning over the edge of that hardy desert growth he gasped with amazement to see, not the great spotted reptile that provided the hunter with a tasty meal, but the dreaded face of the evil one, Wulgaru, gazing up at him from the red earth. Of the other parts of the head and the body nothing could be seen, only a face like an ebony plaque stared up into his own. No facial twitch or movement of eyelid indicated the presence of life, and looking upon it Mahlindji was overcome with a great fear. He had often heard tales from the old men of the tribe of how this 'big-eyed-one' will assume strange forms to trap the weary traveller, and remembering the warning he replaced the spinifix over the staring face and mounting his horse moved off towards the distant homestead.

As he rode Mahlindji thought about the customs of his tribe, remembered how his fellow tribesmen when placing a dead person on the burial-platform of a tree-top would never look behind as they returned to their camp, for fear the evil one, who looks after the shades of the dead, would be treading close behind them, with the

dead one's shade, ready to snatch up those who were foolish enough to look towards it.

As a youth he would often laugh aloud as he remembered each event. Of how the elders and the women would hurry away from the taboo place, ever staring ahead and hurrying till they ended in running, to be in the lead and away from the hidden peril.

He laughed then, but not now, as he thought of the danger that beset him. Legend had already warned him that 'those who look upon the face of Wulgaru will join the shades of the dead', so looking resolutely ahead, Mahlindji rode in a straight line for home.

In the distance he could hear the low rumble of thunder, but he could tell by the alertness of his stock-horse and the twitching of its ears that some fearful strange thing was following behind, only waiting for darkness to ensnare him. Riding on he loudly chanted the Emu-song that would make his horse fleet of foot and thus enable him to reach the shelter of his people at the station homestead.

As he rode on, a new fear came upon Mahlindji when he discovered the sun, in obedience to a magic chant from Wulgaru, was sinking quickly into the earth. In a desperate effort to keep the sun Mahlindji broke into a tribal song to the Sun-woman, calling on her to hold her fire-stick higher in the sky. Chanting and urging his weary horse to a faster gait he came to the dreaded bull-waddie, edge-wood—scrubs that grew betwixt him and the safety of the cattle-station camp-fires.

The aboriginal stockman had need to fear these heavy scrubs in the dusk at the time of an approaching storm, for high on their stick-like branches were the burial platforms of his kin. As he rode towards them he discerned the gleaming white skulls and bones that had fallen from their bark coverings on to the earth below.

A flash of lightning lit up the awful scene and in his fear Mahlindji looked over his shoulder to behold Wulgaru riding 'double-banked' on his own horse. The evil one was beckoning the shades of the dead to come and assist him, and terrified at the sight, and calling on his totems, Mahlindji drove his spurs into his horse and screeching aloud, he galloped into the darkening trees that seemed to close around him.

Mahlindji, the native stockman, told me of that awful night in the scrub of the dead as we sat around the camp-fire at the cattle-station homestead, and telling it to me I wondered if it was a dream or the workings of something beyond our ken.

'Everywhere I could hear noise like big bat-wings,' he told me. 'They swish through the night . . . soft one, and one been knock me to the ground . . . everything go different, and frightened I climbed

up one of the dead burial trees and, too fright, I lay with dead-one under big sheet of bark that cover them . . . terrible . . . proper terrible.'

Everywhere around the trembling cattleman the soft beating of wings could be heard amidst the dry brittle limbs of the burial trees. Now and then one of the seeking creatures would lift up the bark covering of the platform to peer down upon the dead person, and its frightened companion, who feigned death as they looked. As they lowered the covering Mahlindji could hear them muttering to the enquiring shades around. 'There is two . . . there is two . . . there is two,' each repeating the words to the other as they went their way.

The frightened Mahlindji now heard mutterings and heavings going on around him beneath the branches where he was hiding, and after a while he somehow sensed by the swaying that he was being lifted aloft. To the beating of myriad wings and ghost-like chanting he peered out from his bark shroud to look upon a great plain that lay beneath him.

'I been close up longa star . . . too high,' Mahlindji told me as he described the scene. 'On that big plain below I could see mob blackfellow shade mustered up like cattle longa green grass in storm-time . . . and when I look down everybody look up at dead fellow and me longa that burial tree that kind of grow in air.'

Then as Mahlindji watched in amazement he heard the beat of giant 'tap-sticks' and the loud voice of a song-man that set the shades below swaying and stamping as the dust of the plain arose into the sky. . . . 'Mob blackfellow shade from every tribe I see . . . Arunda man with big beard and mob hair that got plenty red ochre and fat on it. . . . Blackfellow from island country with beard on chin like Malay man, and 'nother mob with cut-marks on their bodies like tail of crocodile . . . too many.'

Then like a dream within a dream Mahlindji told me he saw a phantom host march past him towards a large cave, and amidst the dancing horde he saw the faces of his deceased kin looking towards his tree and calling aloud to him to come and join them in this land of the dead. 'They been sing out for me to follow them,' Mahlindji told me, 'and I must do as told, for my flesh was all-a-same nothing.'

And marching along with this ghostly horde, Mahlindji came at last to the cave that he had seen in the distance, and peering in betwixt painted sandstone walls he saw the cave niches crammed full of skulls and bones of the dead. Seeing these things he realized that he was now in his clan's ritual burial cave, and in the presence of the big-eyed Wulgaru who judges the shades of the dead and

cleanses the guilty ones with fire, so that they may return pure to the earth as a babe reincarnated.

'Proper danger place that one,' quickly added Mahlindji, 'live man longa dead place no good . . . big trouble.'

He would have crept away but the other shades behind pressed him onwards and so he finally came into the presence of the great head-man of the dead. 'I been see that big-eye, yet me here to tell that story. . . . That boss Wulgaru<sup>1</sup> been sit longa big stone with big Kurakun smoke-hawk behind him.' As an aside to the tale of Wulgaru Mahlindji explained that the Kurakun was the head-shade for sweetheart business and 'all time watch out for wrong-side black-fellow who all time sneak about after 'nother man's wife.'

From Mahlindji's description I learnt that 'Wulgaru got long ears like donkey and big tooth like pig that stick up outside face . . . proper cheeky-looking one, that Big-eye . . . each side of him where he sit down on that stone I been see two big black dogs with eyes like stars and straight away I savee that them dogs are the killer ones we people call Lundji . . . all night that Lundji mob run and sneak around country and take away people that no more listen properly way to blackfellow laws.'

Mahlindji paused awhile as he listened to the call of a Mukmuk owl in the distance and hearing that night-bird, that is always associated with the shades of the dead, I marvelled at his description of the ritual-dog Lundji, and remembered that when I was at Ayers Rock as a Ranger in Central Australia, one thousand miles away from the locality of this story, some Uluritdja elders, when giving to me the mythology of that part, described the great ritual-dingo Kapunya, and pointed out to me the large stone that symbolizes the creature after it had leapt out of the earth to destroy some youths who had disobeyed the laws of the tribe.

My thoughts were disturbed by the story-teller tapping a small fire-stick on to the larger blazing log of our camp-fire; then lighting his pipe with the smaller firebrand he continued:

'My flesh walkabout too-much when I look-look longa that big boss for dead people, and as I look that Wulgaru, straight-away know that my shade not from dead-one but from proper live-one, and as he looked, that big killer-dog Lundji get up and growl and as it did I turned and raced down that sky-road like scrub-bull that break away from stockyard and got mob cattle-dog behind that heel-em-up.'

<sup>1</sup> By boss Wulgaru Mahlindji meant the head-shade or aboriginal God of death, who is said to sit in judgement of the deceased ones' souls. The minor Wulgarus of the bush, such as are encountered in most of the stories, are said to be the ones that the head-shade has sent out to keep order within the tribes.

And, running 'like scrub-bull', Mahlindji told how he heard the screeching sounds of the pursuing shades as they sped behind him along the sky-road that had been formed by a ray from the rising sun passing through a low bank of clouds in the eastern sky.

'Good job that Devil's-road was there to lead me to the earth,' muttered Mahlindji. 'Suppose no road to give me track to earth then me dead-one from that savage mob who were very angry and wanted to tear me into little pieces.'

'Why?' I asked him. 'Why they want to kill you when some of them were your countrymen?' To which he replied:

'Countrymen when live . . . but shade of dead one got no country . . . all level when dead and they were proper angry because a live person can't go to shade-place . . . that big secret all-a-same Big-Sunday.'<sup>1</sup>

Mahlindji paused awhile, then, suddenly remembering an incident he had left out of the story, he remarked: 'I been close-up forget to tell you how one ugly-one shade been catch hold of me, and when it did I been call out to my Dreaming (totem) to come pull-em-out-me and straight away a big lightning flash came out of sky like snake . . . after that I know nothing, and when I open my eyes daylight everywhere and me lying under that dead-one tree that I been climb up night-time after fall from horse . . . I been sort of wake up like from dead-sleep.'

I asked Mahlindji if he was hurt, and at my question he replied, 'No cut longa beef . . . only shirt and pants tore from that dead shade claws . . . proper cheeky one that business . . . when I wake up I get longa my feet and follow my horse-track when he galloped away that night and no-more-long-time I hear blackfellow calling out as they come back to look for me.'

Out of Mahlindji's tale I learnt that his countrymen back at the cattle-station homestead had found the stockman's saddled horse running along the home paddock fence as they were mustering the plant-horses that morning, and amidst much wailing, a search party set out along the tracks of the horse, and great was the happiness of the Djingnali tribesmen when they knew he was safe, but greater was their consternation when they heard Mahlindji's story.

'All-about reckon me proper lucky-one to come out live-one, they can't make it out how I been look longa Wulgaru face and still come out live . . . I been luck that night old-man,' he told me, 'when I think in night-time about my trouble in that dead fellow tree, me wake up proper frightened . . . proper rubbish one business that.'

<sup>1</sup> Big Sunday is a native term for a sacred and secret ritual forbidden to the uninitiated members of the tribe.

His tale finished, the native cattleman picked up a blazing fire-brand from the camp-fire, and with a 'good-night' to me I watched him wave the lighted stick to and fro, so that it would blaze brightly and serve a two-fold purpose by lighting the way to his camp and ward off the evil spirits of the night that are always hovering around to snap up the unwary who would dare to laugh at the tribal laws.

## HOW WUNGALA DEFEATED A WULGARU

COMING DOWN a heavily wooded path I heard some chattering and sounds of digging coming from a shady tree nearby, and going over towards the noise I came upon a group of aboriginal women digging out some bush-potatoes (yams) that were growing prolifically in that area. As I watched them at their work I was amazed at the skill and labour that goes into the digging of this staple food.

Some dried-up stems close to the earth were carefully examined by the women and children who were not digging, and when I asked them why they did so they laughed aloud at the foolish white-fellow 'who think him know everything but can't savee tucker longa bush'. After their laugh one of them explained to me that as the plant is dead when the tubers are ready for the digging they must rely on the stem structure of the plant to determine the sweet-tasting food. 'Suppose wrong stem,' she explained as she pulled one of the vine-stems apart to show me a white pithy core, 'all-a-same this one . . . then hard work for nothing, for this kind is proper hot one and will burn mouth no-more-little-bit when eat it. But this one' (she showed me a small vine stem with two black fibrous lines along its length), 'well this one is good tucker.'

As she was explaining this item of their culinary botany to me I noticed other women and children gathering something up from a clear patch of earth, and going over to them I saw that they were carefully gathering small black seeds from some ant-mounds and these they put into a finely woven dilly-bag made from pandanus leaves. The seeds came from the small dried blooms of a succulent plant that grows everywhere.

It also interested me to observe how the aboriginal people of the Northern Territory use the efforts of insects to assist them with their needs. The aphid by secreting a sugary substance on the leaves of the salmon and river gums during the light rains of the cold-weather time, provides them with the sugar-leaf manna. The wild bush-bee and the yirumba honey-ant of the desert gives them their sweets. The white rice-like eggs of the red beef-ant provides a rich food for the hunters as they search amidst the broken termite-nests. These ants, who have toiled so patiently to gather together this store of

food around their mounds, are stripped of their riches by human despoilers.

With little to do, at that time, but observe, I boiled my billy-can beside the shady tree of the potato-diggers who worked away in the hard red earth with their sharp-pointed digging-sticks. Before long they were all round me in the shade to share my simple fare. As is their hospitable custom they handed over a portion of their cooked potatoes.

One woman in our group was called Jalna. She was the one I had observed gathering up the black-pig-face seeds and now she was grinding them on one of the flat grinding-stones that are a common feature in these old camp-sites. As she ground away she chanted a story that is always related at seed-grinding time.

Wungala of the Waddaman tribe was out gathering seeds with her small son Bulla.<sup>1</sup> The wet season had been a good one and many were the seeds they gathered on a small sandy flat that lay betwixt a low rocky hill and some swamp-land heavy with jungle growth and vines, and as Wungala gathered, little Bulla kept running around seeking other seed-mounds, and finding them he kept calling impatiently to his mother that she come and gather them up.

The sun shone brightly at first and Wungala heeded not the calling of her son, but when a shadow came over the earth, caused by some clouds passing over the face of the sun, she bade him cease his chatter and warned him over and over again that he must now remain quiet. To the child's natural question of 'Why?' his mother explained that with the shadows came the evil-big-eyed-one from his cave in the hills and should he hear Bulla's chattering and laughing he would seek them out and so cause an evil to come upon them.

But Bulla, like most children, would not believe his mother, and kept up his chatter as she gathered her seeds. Suddenly his laughter became terrified cries as he ran to Wungala, and, with his arms around her neck, he cried aloud that a big-eyed devil was coming their way.

Tremblingly Wungala looked to where her son pointed and beheld an evil Wulgaru creeping upon them amidst the shadows, and knowing that to run and thus show fear was what the Big-eyed-one desired, she laughed aloud at her son's cries and spoke calmly.

'You are wrong, my son; nothing is there but shadows made by bushes waving on the plain.'

Believing his mother, little Bulla ceased his cries and carried on with his seed-gathering. At the sight of this indifference to him

<sup>1</sup> A term which means uncircumsised.

Wulgaru paused in amazement as to why he should seem to remain invisible to these people's gaze, and in his rage he gave out a great yell that caused a wallaby to bound out of a grass patch nearby. Seeing this Bulla again ran into his mother's arms and cried, 'I see a big-eye and I heard it sing out loudly . . . come mother let us run away.'

Once more Wungala spoke calmly to her son. 'You are wrong my boy. I too heard that sound but it came from a white cockatoo screeching in a tree and it was that cry that made the wallaby bound away.' Saying this the native woman went on gathering the seeds around her.

But Wungala had lied to her son. She too had seen the dreaded Wulgaru, but she knew that she must remain calm to escape this dreadful evil-one. . . .

(At this stage of the story Jalna gathered the little native children around her and as she ground her seeds on the big stone she explained.)

'That Wungala been get big flat stone . . . all-a-same this one,' here Jalna pointed at the milling stone with the crushed seeds upon it. 'Wungala been walk about quiet way and when he see that, that Wulgaru get proper angry and hop about like kangaroo for he cannot understand why this black woman can't get fright and run away . . . but no' (emphatically from Jalna) 'that Wungala just won't think about Devil-devil as she grind up the little-fellow seeds on stone . . . all-a-same. . .,' at her words Jalna began grinding the seeds on the stone before her, frequently wetting the mixture with water that she first put into her mouth then squirted upon the dough-like mess before her.

'What about Bulla?' anxiously enquired a little native girl who was trembling with excitement over the story, 'what for him no more run away all-a-same me suppose me there.'

'Suppose little boy run away,' replied Jalna as she chided the child over her impatience, 'then that big-eyed-one eat-em-up all-a-same chicken-hawk eat up little bird that fly up from grass in bush-fire time.'

'Now that Wungala been make bush-bread just like I make it,' continued Jalna, 'and as she does her little boy went to sleep and when that happen that Wulgaru get real angry and poke his face at Wungala . . . but no . . . that brave woman just stay quiet and grind that bush tucker and when it all ground up she made it into damper, all-a-same me.'

Demonstrating her story, Jalna spread the wetted meal into a round flat cake and this she put on to the red-hot coals of a fire so that it would be cooked nicely for eating.

'Properly good cook that Wungala,' excitedly said one of the children as she sniffed at the meal damper cooking on the fire. 'Good cook . . . all-a-same you old woman.'

'No good humbug with story,' angrily interrupted one of the lads who was standing patiently around. 'You only talk-talk like that to make Jalna good-binji so that she will give you this good fellow tucker.'

'Can't tell finish of story till damper cooked,' retorted Jalna, so we all sat down and waited till the damper was finished and the final part of the story was told.

For some time we waited, then as Jalna raked out the damper from the ashes and scrapped away the coals from the steaming meal-cake, she continued. 'That little Bulla been wake up when he smell that cooked tucker and straight away he told his mother that that big-eye still there, but his mother talk-talk, 'You see nothing my boy . . . only smoke that arises from our fire.'

'All this time Wungala was passing her steaming meal-cake from hand to hand, and at her words the enraged monster rushed upon her with outstretched claws to tear her to pieces, but before he could reach her she darted towards him, and with both hands, she pressed the hot sticky mess into the demon's face. As it roared with agony and tried to scrape the stuff from its eyes and mouth, she picked up little Bulla and fled with him to her camp and the shelter of her tribespeople.'

As Jalna finished her story to the ceaseless chatter of the children, she portioned out the meal damper that had been the inspiration of the tale, and all ate slowly as is the aboriginal fashion, and as they munched away one old woman was explaining to us all how the yam-potatoes are ever kept alive by the food spirits of that part.

'When you dig up yam,' she told the listening children, 'you must all-time leave little bit end of that yam in ground . . . if dig it all out, then that food-spirit will get real angry and won't let any more yam grow in that place.'

Many words of bush wisdom she gave as we sat and ate beneath the shady tree. The old black woman was teaching us about the things of nature told according to the tribal traditions, and as a background to it all I could discern the solid digging-sticks of the women that gave to them the foods from the tribal spirits who always provide for those who observed the customs of the tribe and the taboos laid down by the ancient rituals.

## BLACK MAN LAZY ONE

'Black man lazy one,' whitefellow say;  
Give me job-job, nothing one pay,  
Hand me a shovel, talk longa me,  
'Dig up garden then flour and tea.'

Too much work, so no good here,  
I steal that shovel for shovel-nose spear,  
In comes policeman . . . me off town  
And there longa big jail I sit down.

Big boss talk, with hot red face,  
'Blackfellow no good in this place  
Send him compound . . . put him away.'  
So I go settlement and eat all day.

Here me help fat cook all day,  
Plenty girl-friend and gambling pay;  
Everybody happy when I rattle tin-pan  
From spear me now 'tin-opener-man'.

White boss say that he would like me,  
Properly clever-fellow all-a-same he;  
Work in garden . . . send kid school,  
Fight big war and work like a mule.

But no worry I, and they give me house,  
Suppose big boss growl, let him rouse;  
Talk longa mouth-mouth can't hurt me  
And the white boss happy when he worry for we.

## HOW WEINGA DESTROYED A WULGARU

OLD YAMA, the Waddaman aboriginal woman, had completed her evening task of putting her portion of cooked wallaby meat into the fork of the small quinine-tree that provided her with shade during the heat of the day. Satisfied that it would be out of reach of the camp-dogs that were always hunting and sniffing around the camp-fires for a morsel of food that had been tossed away or overlooked, she began her evening walk around the cleared space of the camp with the intention of brushing out with the green bush she held in her hand those footprints of the little native children that are sought out by the evil ones of the bush around.

As she wandered on her way she smiled to herself when she heard the shrill cry of the curlew in the grass-flats among the bottle-brush trees. Hearing its cry she called her children to her side, and warned them to beware of that flying bird-spirit who is associated with the evil-big-eyed-one who wanders around the night.

'That curlew is boss for devil-devil,' she warned them as it called aloud once more. 'When it sing out different way then it tell Wulgaru that it been find foot-track of a little boy or girl, who no more listen right way to its father and mother and walkabout anywhere.'

From my camp, a short distance away from Yama's people, who were working for me on a fencing contract west of the Katherine township, I could see the wide-eyed native children run and sit beside the elder woman. Then they peered into the darkness beyond, and, as though in answer to their unspoken questions I heard the long-drawn-out wail of a dingo coming from the lancewood scrubs that lined the stony hills nearby. At its call a deep silence came over all.

I waited a while to see what would happen, then into the silence I called out in an effort to break the spell, 'What name, old woman? Why everybody quiet?'

'Just nothing,' Old Yama answered, 'picaninny all time get quiet when they hear that bird.'

'Proper cheeky-one, that big-eyed devil-devil,' exclaimed her husband Bilemu as, unknown to the children, he tossed a stone into the bush beyond. As it fell with a thud into the darkness, the children began to cry and huddled up closer to their mothers, who

laughed lightly and chided them for 'mob cry-babies who just fright from stick that fall down from tree.'

'Suppose you sit down quiet then I tell you proper good tale about a young girl who destroyed a big-eyed-Wulgaru,' Yama said to them.

As she spoke the children interrupted her with a question: 'All time you people tell-em-we that no live one can kill Wulgaru-shade, then how Weinga been kill him?'

'Wulgaru been kill himself,' explained Yama. 'Now you listen quiet way and I will tell story.'

'Long time ago,' she began, 'a young woman called Weinga lived in this same country where we all camp this night. She was not a good girl like you mob who sit down quiet-way and do what we old people tell you to do.

'When little girl that Weinga would not tell her mother when she went walkabout in the bush and plenty time everybody in her camp would worry-worry no more little-little-bit because they can't find her . . . too much humbug that one Weinga.

'Now one night when that Weinga been grow up and got big milk (breasts) she been dead-sleep and her dead grannie came up like shade and straight-away that dead-one been take hold of that sleeping girl's hand and led her away into the bush. . . .'

'What for she no wake up and sing out all-a-same me?' questioned one of the listening children.

'Her sleep like dead-one,' explained Yama, 'when anybody walk like that in sleep, they just like dead and suppose anyone wake them up they die properly way.'

From Yama's story it appeared that the shade of Weinga's grandmother led her out into the bush, but instead of returning her to her camp-fire as was the usual custom, she let her rest beneath a small tree so that she would be awakened the next morning by her parents, who would be on her trail at daylight.

'But something go wrong,' Yama continued, 'that Weinga was awakened that night by a terrible growling and shaking, and when she wake up she found out that a proper big-eyed-one had her in his arms and was running, all-a-same wild-dog, into stony devil-devil country.'

'No good sing out now that that big-eyed-one got her,' commented Bilemu from his log-seat near the camp-fire. 'When Wulgaru take hold of anything in his arms then it just like dingo with tucker in its jaws . . . can't let go . . . and that devil-devil too much greedy for girl.'

'Good job no more me,' said one of the listening children.

Yama paused awhile, then continued. 'That Wulgaru been carry

that Weinga to a big hole in the mountain . . . no more properly dark one for moonlight been come from crack longa top-side and front of that cave-place which is full up of bones that belong to her dead country-men.'

A shudder from the listening children became a startled cry as Bilemu tossed another stone into the darkness, and as they all huddled closer to the fire Yama gave out a vivid description of how Wulgaru's cave was a large one with a sandy floor and sides covered with the ochred drawings of the tribal elders.

'Proper dead-fellow place,' Bilemu explained to me, 'old-time blackfellow all-time go there for big-Sunday business . . . proper danger place for girl . . . must be that Weinga proper sorry now for bad-girl business . . . but too late now . . . more better good first time.'

To prevent Weinga from running away, the Wulgaru tied his captive's wrist to his ankle with a piece of strong bush rope, and after seeing that all was securely tied, the evil one was soon asleep on his sandy bed; and as he slept the young girl planned a method to escape.

Knowing that the native artists who had painted the walls of the cave would probably leave some of the coloured ochres behind, she carefully searched in the sand around where she lay, and soon her diligence was rewarded by finding some of the red and white ochres beneath the sandy floor. Carefully she ground these on a piece of sandstone with her free hand and, making no noise, she wet the lot with her spittle as she had seen the camp-artists do when painting pieces of bark. Then, with the well-chewed end of a green plant-twig that grew beside her, she patiently painted the leering cruel face of a savage monster on the thigh of the sleeping Wulgaru.

'What for that Weinga can't kill that big-eye dead-fellow with big stone?' asked one of the young lads, only to be quickly rebuked by Bilemu, who replied that he 'been talk-talk plenty time that nobody can kill devil-devil . . . Wulgaru must kill himself . . . now listen and no more humbug.'

'That Weinga was too clever,' continued Yama as the others grew silent once more, 'she just gammon sleep and wait for moonlight to shine in cave on Wulgaru's leg. When it did she pull her arm and call out loud, and that big-eye sing out too when he see that ugly one face on his leg jump about no-more-little-bit.

'And in his fright that Wulgaru think that 'nother one cheeky devil-devil been want to kill him and steal girl so he picked up the big stone-axe that he always carried and, Bang!! That silly-one devil-devil hit longa that face, and straight-away his leg been fly away from his body and when it does, that young girl run back to

her camp with that Wulgaru leg and all about her countrymen no-more-little-bit fright when they see what she was carrying.'

After a long silence Bilemu remarked, 'All-about you kiddies want to think-about that story . . . suppose you see devil-devil longa bush, more better keep quiet and not frightened, then might be you beat that Wulgaru all-a-same Weinga.'

As though in answer to the old man a curlew wailed once more from the swamp-land, and in the tenseness of the moment Bilemu beat two fire-sticks together and laughed as the kiddies huddled together around their elders beside the camp-fires and watched the sparks from the beaten sticks drift off into the night.

'All night devil-devil Wulgaru look about for the little-one eyes that dance longa blackfellow's fire,' he told the children, 'that nothing when we old people make them,' he explained, 'but if little fellow boy or girl make them, then that not right.'

'What devil-devil do?' boldly asked one of the children.

'Him wait near fire and then . . . ' instead of a word Bilemu cracked a stick behind his back and at the sound the children chorused, 'You been gammon that time, old man . . . that not devil-devil . . . only you.'

The tale was finished, and as though to round off the evening Bilemu began to chant beside the camp-fire as Yama rolled out their swags on the earth in preparation for the night's rest. As they did so I returned to my camp-fire and lay upon my swag, happy in the thought that life was good on the open road—made more so by a race of people who could tell the stories of their tribes beside the smouldering gum-tree fires.

## MY MAN SAY

White man properly different kind,  
Watch on wrist, then wind . . . wind . . . wind;  
Pull up sleeve and look all day,  
Look when work and look when play.

Man look time then say, 'Must go'.  
Man look clock and then him know  
Time is boss, all understand  
Must keep eye on face and hand.

'Tick . . . tock . . . tock,' that wrist-watch say,  
'Me big Boss, you do my way,  
I make you wait and I make you run,  
I make you work when you like fun.

'I send off coach . . . I send off train.  
My hand start big aeroplane;  
Big-fellow boss, he must watch me.  
Breakfast, dinner and supper and tea.'

My man listen and then him say,  
'No time sleep,' and 'No time stay,'  
Too much hurry down the street,  
Terrible place when, 'No time eat.'

## HOW BEMA BECAME A DOCTOR

FROM THE aboriginal camp came a low chanting, broken by an occasional swishing of bushes and a shouting that denoted a kuran or medicine-man of the tribe was at work casting out some evil poison from a sick person. Enquiring as to what was the trouble, I was told that 'Old man Bema come up from stone-country-side to fix-em-up that one Pompey who is sick from singing-business.'

Further enquiries revealed that the sick youth had been 'poked in the ear-hole by a devil-devil', and this misfortune, or magic, had made him strange in his ways. Continually following people around the camp and talking about the things they were doing had made some of the old folk annoyed. So, after much discussion around the camp-fires, they had sent out a runner to bring in a recognized specialist for this complaint, and now he was on the job trying to cast out the magic poison.

From experience I had learned that these aboriginal kurans—such as Bema—really believed that they had obtained their art of healing from a spirit-shade of the dead who had fought them in deadly combat. They had the power to cure, and should a patient die the fault is not theirs, but lay with the patient's relatives for not handing out sufficient tributes to help the kuran in his battle. With this lack of tribute faith the healer lost his spiritual faith and the victory went to the one who 'sung' the patient. Cure came from faith, and faith from payment. The bigger the payment the greater the success in the cure. Knowledge was the kuran's stock-in-trade, so he was kept alive and happy in his old age.

'All day that Pompey talk-talk to himself,' explained an old aboriginal called Rainbow, when I asked what was wrong. 'That boy too-much run-about after girl-friend and might-be 'nother-one girl get jealous and sing Djarada song over him and make him go mad for woman-business.'

That evening, as the chanting was at its loudest, I walked down to the camp to see the tribal alienest in action. Amidst the dust and smoke of his primitive consulting-room I caught my first glimpse of the great bush psychologist at his work.

Being a hoary old member of his cult, Bema was completely naked, as was the patient. Everywhere smoke arose from a heap of green

bushes piled on a blazing fire of bush sticks. All was a confused babble of chanting, silenced now and then by a loud bellow from Bema as he laid about his patient with a green switch which was afterwards tossed on to the smoking pile.

From the acrid smoke I could hear choking coughs from Pompey, who was trying to balance himself on one leg on a rickety beer case that had been picked up from the local rubbish tip, and what with the smoke, bellowing and strokes from the kuran's switch, he was having a difficult time keeping his balance.

A learned elder was standing beside me as I contemplated the scene, and observing my looks of complete bewilderment, he explained the rudiments of the cure as the treatment went on.

'This one Pompey thinks he is like two-way,' he explained in the only way he could describe a schizophrenic. 'Him head one way, and then 'nother way . . . somewhere girl been make his ear-hole no-good for sweetheart business. . . . Now Bema puts him on one leg in smoke, shout out loud-one, and belt him with bushes, and straight away that sick fellow lose everything and bye-and-bye him think right way.'

Watching the antics of Bema, as my informant explained it all, I could see there was a definite method behind his procedure. In the middle of the uproar Pompey fell off the beer-case into the flames and was revived by a bucket of cold water from a nearby water-hole. He was then replaced on the box to continue the treatment. I slipped away.

For five days the shouting and swishing went on, and on the sixth day as Pompey passed my camp in the care of the old kuran, I handed him a piece of mouldy tobacco. He had accepted such things before, but now he tossed it away in disgust. Seeing this sign of mental stability Bema smiled, and mentioned he would be up next day to 'see me nothing', but I knew that that was but an excuse to tell me about his next move.

Next day Bema came with Pompey and explained he was going to take the patient into the bush to complete the cure. 'A long walk will do him good. . . . I will make him carry the big load of tucker you will give me,' he added slyly. 'With this on his head and a long walk he will forget his trouble and be happy in the bush.'

They received their rations the next day, and away he and Pompey went into the stony country to the east. Months afterwards I saw them both out hunting the wild magpie-geese of the swamp-lands.

Pompey was completely cured, and that night I asked old Bema how he had come by this art of curing the mentally ill. As we both ate our share of the hunt, he told me how he became a kuran.

'My father was a great kuran,' he began. 'Often he would go

into the hills during a big corroboree, and with the other "flour-bags" (grey-beards) of our tribe he would talk-talk big about the latest cures and the best medicines . . . and when I grew up into a big man, my father told me some of these cures; he wanted me to be a good kuran too. So I learnt the chants that went with the cures, and the old men of my tribe rejoiced as they heard me.

'Then, one day, as I was walking through a thick scrub, I heard a beating of sticks and looking that way I saw a great big-eyed Wulgaru dancing through the trees as he came my way. Behind him I could see the people who were beating the tap-sticks of his dance, and I knew them to be the dreaded Moombas who remove the life-essence from the tribespeople and so cause them to die.

'I could not run away,' he continued, 'for no one can run away from evil. I knew that it must be faced if I wished to live, so I turned to face the evil one as he sprang upon me.'

From Bema's story I learnt that the fight was bitter. 'But somehow I been kind of die,' he explained, 'just like big sleep and as I sleep I dream they put my body in a big grass dilly-bag . . . they tie that bag by strong bush rope to a tree branch and then that mob swing me . . . just like kiddie on swing and as they swing me they sing proper sweet-one song.

'Then, after a time, I kind of wake up,' he continued, 'and when I look around, that Wulgaru has gone, but that same Moomba men are standing on one leg beside a dead tree. They were singing the killer-song of the Moombas, and as they sing, a big rainbow water-snake came out of the sky and swallowed me up like bush snake does when it catches its tucker.

'But that Rainbow was too-big . . . its belly was like a big rock-hole and as I swum around in it I thought of a white man's pocket-knife that I had fixed by the blade in the hair of my head . . . so I open up that knife to cut my way out of that big snake and covered with slime, I crawled over to a meat-ant's nest so that they could clear the mess from my body.

'When the Moombas saw me come out alive from that sacred snake they laughed aloud as they rubbed my body with their sweat, and as they did that "friend-business" I went into a sleep to awaken in the same place where I began the fight . . . I looked for the tracks of the Wulgaru and the Moombas, but nothing I see, then I knew that this was proper blackfellow business and I was a kuran that could make people die with my songs, and by others could I make them alive once more.'

Old Bema went back to his camp and his hunting, and a few days later I was smitten with a violent pain in the stomach. With no white doctor to help me I lay for a while, with naked belly, on some

sun-heated stones to try and relieve the pains, and as I lay on the stones the old kuran went by.

He asked me what was wrong, and when I told him my symptoms that denoted colic, he immediately went to a green eucalyptus-tree. Plucking off a bunch of its young fresh leaves he bade me eat them, and eager for something to ease the pain I did as he requested.

It was my first cure by primitive man but it was not the last. My next cure was when a kuran fixed up a pain in my back which I received from a severe fall. In agony I lay down on the earth as he requested me to do, and his treatment was to press on each joint of my backbone with the bare heel of his foot. 'Kinked back,' a bush-mate told me when I explained the symptoms. 'That's an old native trick . . . they know all the moves . . . native women are better at it than the bucks . . . they have a lighter touch.'

'A lighter touch'—I thought he was joking until I discovered that some of the old women are kurans too. I questioned the aboriginal women about this and they told me that women have cures for 'women-business'. Hot stones wrapped in wet grass for abdominal pains in childbirth, milk in the children's eyes, passing the hands through fire as a form of sterilization when the child is born and the rubbing the newly-born infant with warm ashes from a newly-made fire.

Everywhere is healing in a primitive land. Knowledge had come to the aborigines by experience. In their sacred rituals the hoary kurans passed on the cures they discovered each season to the elders from other tribes—the herbs of the bush; special mud from springs; and above all, the cure that comes from a faith in the kuran who has been given his knowledge of healing from the spirit-shades of life and death through the phallic emblem of the serpent—which remains the symbol of healing in our own times.

## MONEY JUST STONE

Whitefellow think about money all day,  
'Money . . . money . . . money,' him all-time say;  
Money buy this and money buy that,  
Look for money like cat hunt rat.

Whitefellow hungry, then, no fun,  
Work in the big town, all time run;  
Won't hunt tucker like blackfellow can,  
Too much cranky is the whitefellow man.

My man say, 'When man seek gold  
They die for water and they cry from cold,  
Then when find, go pub and store,  
Spend all the money and go look more.'

Whitefellow different kind from we,  
Leave bone dry sand, body longa sea;  
Everywhere big-fellow-boot go tramp,  
Tramp . . . tramp . . . tramp from camp to camp.

My man say that money just stone,  
Stones that whitefellow can't leave 'lone;  
Put in bank and then all day  
Go pull it out and pay . . . pay . . . pay.



A group of aboriginal stockmen beside a cattle yard. (See "Mahlindji's Ride with Wulgaru")



Around these ancient grinding-stones the aboriginal mothers told stories to their children (See "How Wungala defeated a Wulgaru")



(Left) A young aboriginal woman from Melville Island, who told me "The story of the stolen baby"



(Below) The author beside his tent in Northern Territory Reserve

BRADLEY, THE MUDBRA MAN

**A**LONG THE north-south road from Darwin to Newcastle Waters, in those days before the bitumen road was put through to Alice Springs, the old bush road meandered from water-hole and well over the land, and along this road the horse- and camel-teams carted loads for the cattle- and telegraph-stations of the Northern Territory. Each well was equipped with a tank and trough, and the water from some of these deep wells was hauled up by horse or camel by an ingenious arrangement of wheels and a steel rope that passed over a wheel on the well-head.

The method of watering was for the teamster or traveller to harness up a horse or camel to the rope, and by pulling along a well worn 'walk', the heavy bucket would be raised from the water to the surface. Its contents would then be released into the trough through a valve in its bottom that opened as it was lowered on to a release-peg at the head of the water-race.

To the Mudbra aborigines, who lived to the west of Daly Waters, the deep line of wells was a great resting-place when on the hunt, but should the heavy buckets be left empty by some improvident traveller, then it was the rule of these tribesmen to send their most agile man down the timbered well, but it was ever a risky business to go down over one hundred feet to get at the supply.

Camping on the Mudbra waterhole beside the telegraph station of Daly Waters I heard some wild laughter coming from a native camp a short distance away, and when a native woman called Nelly came by I asked her what was on, but before she could reply an old black man called Bradley came up, and immediately the young woman burst into renewed fits of laughter as she pointed to him with the remark that: 'We been all dead-laugh no-more-little-bit for this old man . . .'

'Nothing funny to laugh about,' came testily from the old fellow, 'me been close up drown . . . all-about you mob just like cockatoo that sing out for nothing . . .'

'Nothing, nothing,' retorted the other, 'that funny story . . . too funny . . .'

I interrupted their talk to ask what it was all about, and old

Bradley replied as I handed him over the usual pannikin of tea. 'This mob laugh-laugh nothing . . . I tell you story proper way.'

'Me and my old woman,' he began, 'were out hunting that-away,' he pointed with his lip and jaw to the westward, 'and we been come in to that deep whitefellow well. . . . But nothing water in trough or bucket. . . .'

'Cranky whitefellow been leave empty bucket longa top and that thing too heavy for this old man,' interrupted Nelly. 'Some fellow white man proper no more think about anything, all-a-same some blackfellows.'

'When I find nothing water,' continued Bradley, 'I been talk-talk to my old woman; "You wait here and I go down well and bring up water in billy-can" . . . then I go down . . .'

'Go down,' laughingly interrupted Nelly. 'You been slip and fall down like stone . . . old woman been tell-em-we that you been sing out all the way like baby. . . .'

'Baby nothing,' disgustedly retorted the old man. 'I been go down easy way. Big snake in timber make me fright and when I try to get away from that cheeky-one I been slip and close up drown when I go long way into that water . . . proper long way I been fall, and when I hit that water I close up go longa bottom . . . too deep and properly cold one too.'

As the well he was talking about was over one hundred feet from the level of the ground to the water, I could only smile at the old man's understatement regarding his descent.

'I been close up lose wind when I hit that water,' he continued, 'I been proper no good.'

'No good all right,' said Nelly, 'that old woman belonging to him been hear that old man cry, and when she look down well she see nothing so she think meself. "Old man, must be him dead, more better I go to Mudbra place and get some countrymen to pull out that dead fellow." So that old woman been run all the way and when we hear the news we all cry no-more-little-bit as we go back to that well.'

After Nelly had had her say Bradley continued with his story. 'I no more hit side of well when I fall down . . . I been fall straight to water . . . but when I kind of wake up I find meself holding on to that well timber . . . then I sing out loud one but I hear nothing from top-side so I climb up that well blackfellow way, one leg one-side -one-side, and after long time I get top and I can see by track that my old woman been run hard fellow longa road. Then I follow that road on her track till me tired then I sleep in shade place like dead-one till me hear blackfellow talk-talk as they come up . . . when I call out all about that mob been stand still then they race

away like brumby (wild-horse) when they see stockman coming after them . . . all about been make me frightened.'

'No good you tell story one-way old man,' interrupted Nelly, 'You no more fright . . . only we been fright,' she explained it all to me. 'When old Bradley's old woman been come back and tell us about old man in well we been all go back, and when we walk back we proper frightened that this old man's shade might follow his old woman, so we talk-talk strong fellow way to make us brave one. Then when we reach that shady kumindji country, that is all time full up of big-eye Wulgaru mob, this old man been sing out longa we . . . straightaway we look for dead one and then this old fellow rise up from white bull-dust and he look proper white one all-a-same dead fellow . . . talk about fright . . . we been turn round and down road full-race with old Bradley singing out behind we no-more-little-bit.' Nelly paused awhile then continued, 'But we can't race all the time so we all stop and then we look back proper way and find old man alive and then everybody happy properly way . . . then from cry we straight-away dead-laugh.'

'No more dead-laugh,' grumbled Bradley. 'Me close up die when I fall down that rubbish one well . . . proper long way.'

'No matter you all time growl-growl for story old man,' retorted Nelly. 'We been have big laugh . . . proper good story . . . bye-and-bye blackfellow talk-talk that they will make big corroborree from that story where you was proper devil-devil and frightened all-about we.' She paused a little, then continued. 'Your story more better than that Ngaltu one when he fell gut-up from tree and chuck wind like dead bullock that burst from stinking one . . . proper funny story everywhere. One time . . .'

Nelly's tale was interrupted by a dog fight in the native camp, and at the sound, my friends were up and away to protect their canine friends, yowling for help amidst the dust and confusion of their bush wurlies.

## MIGHT BE . . . I DON'T KNOW

By gun-law cast we out the spear,  
Yet still we live where shade-trees grow;  
And now we chant in churches here  
To God, from whom all blessings flow,  
Might be . . . might be . . . I don't know.

The God-men say that Jesus came  
To save our sins, to let us know  
The right from wrong, and in His name  
To pray and then to heaven go;  
Might be . . . might be . . . I don't know.

The God-men say, 'When die go sky  
Through pearly gates where rivers flow.'  
The God-men say, 'When die we fly  
Just like eagle-hawk and crow.'  
Might be . . . might be . . . I don't know.

A black-one I, yet in the Book  
Are Angels white, the same as snow.  
And in the picture-book I look,  
And everywhere black devils go  
To hell . . . well . . . might be . . . I don't know.  
Might be . . . might be . . . I don't know.

PART THREE

TALES OF CAUTION AND OBSERVATION

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**T**ALES OF CAUTION are those told to the native children, around the camp-fires at night or at those times when a bird, animal or fish goes by and so reminds the narrator about the tale.

Each tribe has many of these simple tales, and after they have been told to the little ones the tale is always referred to should the youngster break some of the simple rules of camp-life.

The unruly child is warned of what happened to the brolga (native-companion) who deliberately and wilfully swallowed the fish that was the property of the silent secretary-bird or jabiru, and the lump in the greedy brolga's throat is pointed out as the spot where the enraged fish stuck and nearly choked the greedy-one who would disobey the laws of camp-life.

The Tales of Observation concern the habits of all creatures on land and sea and air. Each tale is a part of the children's training for the hunting life. Thus do we observe that in the tale of the stolen baby, the dugong, wallaby and cockles are in the area where the incident occurred. The story of the goanna and the long-necked turtle contains a hint as to where the long-necked turtles live; how both it and the goanna dig in during the dry and cold weather and how the cry of the storm-bird (also called the plum-bird because it 'sings' the blooms on to that tree) calls them out of their long sleep so that the long-necked turtle can lay its eggs in the sandy places of the land. Thus these tales become a guide to hunting, and even to a way of life and tribal behaviour.

## THE STORY OF THE STOLEN BABY

THE CAMP-FIRES of the tribesmen were heavy with the smell of cooking dugong, and in the glow beyond the firelight I could see the wooden canoes of the huntsmen lying on the sand-beach that gave to these people their name of 'Wargite', or 'Sand-beach People'.

An old native woman had just thrown a stick at the hungry-looking camp-dogs that sniffed around the native earth-ovens, and as she did she told a group of children, who had gathered around, the often repeated tale of how this *mamanduru* (the dugong, a mammal of the sea) was once a native woman of their tribe who was driven into the salt water by her one-time friend, the scrub-wallaby Moodja.

'Long time ago,' she told the gathered children, 'two very good friends, one called Mamanduru and the other Moodja were out gathering cockles on the mud-flats at a place called Dartpur, which is the Frog-dreaming stone a little out to sea from a well of fresh water on a mangrove and sandy beach called Binbinya.

'Each one had a little baby which they carried on a clean sheet of paper-bark under their arm, as the hunting women carry their bark-dishes when out gathering yams and lily-bulbs.

'Outwardly the two women seemed to be happy as they went their way, laughing and chanting the tribal songs, but that Mamanduru was very bitter with her friend Moodja whose baby was so pretty that everybody in the camp would come over to tickle it and so see it smile, but Mamanduru's baby was as ugly as old frog-mouth the bird who sits all-day on a tree as we go by . . . terrible thing to be jealous,' warned the story-teller, 'a "bad-head" makes people mad and cruel.'

'Why do people want to be cruel?' chorused the listening children, but to the question the old story-teller replied,

'Some people all day like that . . . get jealous for everything that is not theirs . . . now listen.'

The children became quiet and the story-telling old woman continued. 'Now that Mamanduru and Moodja put their sleeping children under a nice shady beminin (hibiscus-tree) and when it was low tide they went out to gather up the cockles of which there were many in that place.'

'No more long time,' continued the old woman, 'that Mamanduru say gammon-way to her friend: "I got plenty cockle now and I go to shady tree near well to cook them ready for you to eat with that honey we cut from the tree . . ."'

To the children's cries as to how nice it is to eat cockles with honey she replied, 'But that rubbish-one Mamanduru been lie to her friend . . . she got only little bit tucker in her bark carrying-dish, all she did was to go back and steal that pretty little baby of Moodja's and when she pick it up she straight-away go long way into the bush. . . .'

'Proper cheating-one, that horrible woman,' interjected the wild-eyed children. 'When I get baby,' excitedly said a small girl, 'I no more leave it behind no matter ugly-one . . . proper rubbish-one that stealing woman.'

The elder woman smiled at all their chatter, and when silence came on once more she continued with the tale.

'Well! that Moodja woman came out of mud-flat with plenty cockle and that poor thing cry-cry properly-way when she find out that her pretty baby has been stolen and the ugly one left behind in its place.'

'Did she find her pretty-one baby?' anxiously enquired a small child who had never heard the story before. But her question was answered by the other children who warned her to 'No more hum-bug but listen properly-way.'

'Well,' continued the story-teller, 'that Moodja had hard time following that Mamanduru's tracks . . . too much she all-time double back on track and walk on stone and in water to cover up her foot-tracks . . . she was proper cunning-one . . . but that sorry-sorry mother been keep going and at last found Mamanduru and her baby in a big clump of pandanus trees beside a big salt water beach.'

'What been happen now?' said a new arrival.

'Two-fellow been fight hard fellow way with big fighting-sticks,' answered the old woman. 'Mamanduru been say that the pretty-one baby was hers, and as she say that Moodja get very angry and throw that poor ugly thing into a big pandanus-tree, and straight-away it been change into the mother of all the frogs that lives in them prickly leaves.'

'Proper no good business,' commented one of the children, 'that poor ugly baby now frog for nothing.'

'Not for nothing,' said the story-teller. 'That baby frog make plenty other frogs in that tree, and these are friends of all the baby-shades that belong to us black-people. All together they sit down in them pandanus-trees and wait for a mother to go by, then they jump

longa them and go inside that mother's belly and when born they are proper children like you mob.'

'When me big girl,' anxiously said one of the girls, 'I no more go by that place . . . too many baby cry-cry all night.'

'Me like baby,' broke in a little toddler excitedly, 'me huggle it no-more-little-bit . . . all-a-same white lady give doll to baby.'

'Tell story,' said a serious-faced girl of about seven years. 'I like hear this story.'

'Well,' continued the elder woman, 'that two women fight now with their wooden fighting-sticks and that poor Moodja got hit on her knees with a stick, and as the stick hit, her legs went 'nother-way and she hop off into the jungle all-a-same wallaby . . . but before she change to wallaby she been give that Mamanduru a proper good beating with a fire-stick that she picked up from the fire that Mamanduru was using to cook her cockles. . . . That fire-stick got plenty ashes and these been go into Mamanduru's eyes so she ran blind-eyed into the salt water with Moodja's baby on her back . . . after that time wallaby keep in scrub, dugong live in sea, and frog cry-cry at night in tree . . . two-fellow give us tucker and 'nother one give us babies. . . .'

'Good story . . . proper true too,' put in a small native lad. 'You look at dugong eye and it is small one from them hot ashes in fight, and that mother dugong always carries her baby on her back when she swim along in sea.'

'Give milk from "tit-ti" just like we mothers,' cut in a little girl.

'But one thing you been miss,' remarked the old woman as she handed to each one a portion of the cooked dugong meat. 'How does frog get about?'

'Hop!' chorused the children.

'How does the wallaby get about?'

'Hop-hop!' came the children's reply.

'How does the dugong go in sea?'

'Hop to top of water to get wind all-a-same we black-people,' the laughing native children answered.

'Everybody right,' laughingly said the native woman as she went on with her cooking. Then questioningly, 'Proper good story?'

'Proper good story,' from the children, 'tell we more.'

'Might be 'nother-one-time,' replied the other, as she placed a large piece of cooked meat into the fork of a tree so that it would be away from the scavaging camp-dogs. 'Nother-one-time I tell good story . . . suppose we talk-talk too much now might-be big fellow devil-devil come in from bush and too-much hear-em-we . . . more-better all-about sleep now proper way.'

At her words some of the children lay down on the clean sand

as was the custom of the beach-people; others called softly for their mothers to come with a lighted fire-stick and shield them from the evil ones of the night, who would cause a sickness to come upon them should they walk through the darkness. In the hustle of their departure I thanked the old woman for her good story and with a 'Marmuk' I went my way down the bush-track that led to my camp-fire beside a lily-lagoon that was heavy with the perfume of its violet-scented blooms.

## WHITEFELLOW MAN HIM MAKE ME WILD

Whitefellow man he make me wild  
Singing out, singing out, 'Stop that child  
Him cry too much and it hurt my ear,'  
Then I make answer, 'Listen here.'

'One time you were little one kid,  
Do just same as 'nother one did,  
Have good time and make man wild,  
Now you old you cry, "Stop child".

'My young lad, him good fellow boy,  
Play in mud with stick for toy;  
Then when happy you all time growl,  
"Stop that kid . . . him too much howl."

'Calf and puppy-dog play all day,  
Piccaninny, all-about learn that way;  
Listen boss one day we die,  
So let kid cry if they like to cry.'

## STORY ETCHED ON BARK

OLD NIPPER DALMARU of the red-lily clan was sitting beneath a shady love-apple tree beside a goose-swamp lagoon. The water was bright with pink lotus-blooms that floated among the disc-like leaves of the nelumbo, which grew prolifically in the waters of this land.

Dalmaru was the last of the X-ray artists that once lived and hunted in this land. Around his tribe, in the years gone by, were other artists who painted on yellow backgrounds. For their art Dalmaru had nothing but scorn, claiming that it was stuff that anyone could understand. 'Not like ours,' he explained to me as he pointed out the internal organs of a reptile he was painting on bark. 'We people paint the things we would like to eat, and that makes us happy as we work.'

Now Dalmaru was the last of his tribe as he sat beside his lagoon. Many years ago his clan had moved westward towards the centre of contact with the white people, and as they moved away from their country the Kumardu artist of the yellow backgrounds came from the eastward, and with their coming came the new art that was painted over the land, even to the painted caves of Obir on the western side of the East Alligator River.

Dalmaru's country was a land of sandstone hills, wide swamp-plains and lagoons teeming with wild-fowl and fish, with wallaby in the adjoining jungles. During the cold weather the ancient tribes of the Kakadu would hunt on the plains for their daily needs, but in the wet season, when the floods covered the land, the clans would be up in the high hills, from the mosquitos and the storm waters. Up there, in smoky caves with red smooth ledges of sandstone walls, they developed their cave-art to a high degree of primitive skill.

Being natural artists, they were always putting their thoughts down on the pieces of mess-mate bark that lay around their camps. Now, seeing the earnest look of the native children as they sat about the old artist beside the red-lily lagoon, I could sense that Dalmaru was painting a story and explaining it to the children as he went along; so I joined in with them to share the tale.

Patiently he went about his work. Carefully he ground a lump of coloured ochre on a flat piece of stone and when it was fine of texture

he wet it with his spittle into a thin paste. I watched him carefully as he renewed his brush by plucking off a twig from a small plant nearby and after chewing the end, he went on with his work. As he painted he chanted some tribal song I could not understand.

The artist himself was a remarkable aborigine of the old school. He had a large scar down his face which had been handed out to him by a charging bull buffalo when, as he put it, 'I been work longa white man shooting-camp long time ago.' And on his side was an ugly spear-wound that he had received in a tribal fight 'when I been young man and run after 'nother man's wife . . . too-much'.

His picture on the piece of bark was all but completed on my arrival, and looking at it I could see that it portrayed the plain-goanna Podjudu, drawn as one would expect it to be featured in the X-ray art, and beside it was the long-necked turtle Imamundu, which is much sought after by the tribesmen. Mixed up with the two figures were a series of lines and dots with a broad splash of red as a central piece.

I asked him for the story as I handed over a piece of tobacco, as one would naturally do as a form of trade, and as I waited I looked upon the pleasant scene before me.

Close by, on the broad surface of the Red-lily lagoon I could see the long-legged, long-toed Christ-bird stepping lightly on the lotus leaves that floated like large plates on the surface of the water. Swimming in the narrow limpid lanes between the pink-lotus blooms were the magpie and pigmy-geese of that part of the country. Everywhere was a mass of colour. Adding to the scene were the large patches of brown beyond the lagoon that somehow seemed to be dead leaves. Yet from the sounds that arose from them I could tell that they were the whistling-ducks that feed in thousands in this lovely land that was spoiled only by the myriads of stinging mosquitoes that swarmed during the night-time and the rainy season.

A gentle cough from my artist friend drew my attention back to him, so patiently propping the bark etching against an itchy-tree trunk, he began his story.

'When I see rain clouds come up in this country I think of plenty things . . . I picture all them things here.' Saying this he pointed to his head, then continued, 'Then when I get proper picture in head I go and get good sheet of mess-mate bark and I paint that story on that bark.'

'What for?' I interrupted, and he answered politely:

'I paint for nothing . . . just paint to make me happy.'

As in a trance Dalmaru sat beneath his shady tree and the native children and I awaited his pleasure. For some time he puffed at his long wooden smoking-pipe, till finally, satisfied and contented, he

pointed at the bark-painting with his pipe, then began his simple tale. . . .

'When cold-weather-time come into my country, then this one (here he pointed at the large goanna of the drawing before him), this one Podjudu all-time dig into the soft ground and there it sleeps all the time till the Sun-woman comes to our land once more to chase the cold-weather-time away. This one'—again he pointed with his pipe-pointer to the long-necked turtle of the drawing—'this one we call Imumundu, and when the water-holes and lagoons of our country dry up in the dry and cold-weather-time, it makes itself proper fat and digs itself under the wet mud. There it sleeps all the time till the big rains come and the water-holes are full once more. But while it is dry-time then it is in proper prison'—he searched around for a comparison of white people's ways, then added—'just like man when he do wrong and go jail and must wait for outside gate to open and let him out.'

'Well,' he continued after explaining to me that he knew all about whitefellow's prison because he had been there 'for cattle-killing business when we been hungry longa rain-time.' 'We black people understand all those things, for we have learnt them from our mothers and fathers who would teach us, just as white children are taught in school . . . so when the water-holes and swamps dried up we would all go down to camp at those places, and then, after the swamp-grass was burnt, the women of our tribe would drag green bushes over the earth to sweep aside the burnt grass covering. After that it was easy for us to find the spots where the long-necked turtle had dug in for their long sleep. When we find that place we poke into that spot with a sharp-pointed stick and when that stick hit the back of that turtle it would blow out wind just like dugong does when it comes up for air at sea . . . easy then to dig it out and have a good feed.'

Dalmaru now pointed to the thin white lines of his bark-painting and explained that they represented the rain falling down during a storm; the splash of red was the swamp-places and the pools of water that lay in them from a recent storm. 'This one picture is of the early rain-time when that Podjudu finds his camp-place getting warm . . . when that happens then out he comes as the plum-bird calls for the rain, and, just like we black people, he goes and finds a place where the Imumundu has dug in, but can't get out for it is too hard. Straight-away that goanna digs up that turtle, and'—Dalmaru looked at us with a smile upon his face—'that long-necked turtle then go straight for that new storm-water like pigeon that fly at sunset for drink, and when it does, that cunning Podjudu follows behind it like buffalo calf after its mother. . . .'

'This gammon or true story?' I questioned the old man, and at my words he quickly replied, 'This story true one . . . I been see that goanna plenty time with this . . . my eye.' He pointed to his eye as he spoke, then continued: 'Plenty time I look and see that Podjudu goanna with two front-feet on turtle back . . . turtle in lead with goanna behind . . . proper funny, but proper true.'

'One time I been follow that turtle and goanna to the water-place and after they both drink that turtle went to a sandy place and straight-away it dug a hole and laid its eggs. When I see that goanna dig out and eat them turtle-eggs then I know that the story my mother and father told me about the bark story was true. That is why I now paint the story on bark and tell it to the children so that they will be able to hunt and gather up that proper good tucker all-a-same me when I was little fellow boy.'

'Why can't the turtle dig itself out?' I questioned the old man.

'Ground too hard at first rain,' he replied, 'when wet-weather set in properly way, and big swamps and lagoons full up then the Imumundu's come out easy way . . . that is proper right lore for the turtles . . . goanna only digs them out to find water and to eat up its eggs for tucker . . . black people understand this thing, so we look for the turtle-goanna tracks in storm-time and then we follow them up and eat everything . . . turtle-egg, turtle and goanna . . . black-people boss for everything . . . too clever.'

Dalmaru picked up his bark-painting with a remark that he would show it to 'all-about people longa camp', then added, 'When I paint picture at right time, which is now, that painting tells me everything, so I go to that right place and hunt that fat goanna and long-necked turtle . . . me eat plenty turtle-egg too.'

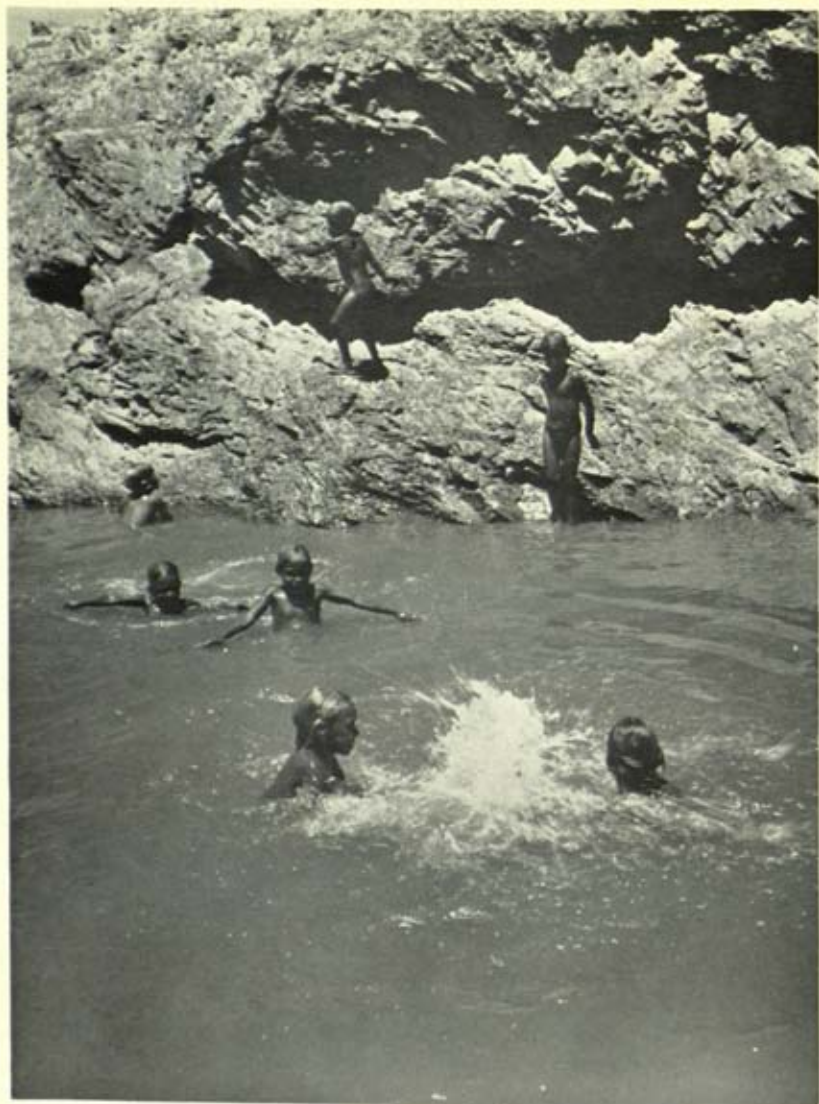
He stood up and the native children clustered around him. As they walked down the old aboriginal path beside the Red-lily lagoon I looked at the primitive ochre-coloured grinding stones at my feet. The simple paint brush lay beside it, and then, as in a dream, I heard the raucous call of a storm-bird coming in from the northland, and with its call came a low peal of thunder that told us all that the early rains were here.

(Right) Dolly was a Tewi composer of love songs. Her cast-off lovers claimed the songs under tribal copyright law. (See "Ikeikinni and Kupa-runni")



(Below) Here at my hut on Bathurst Island, Jamalumpowa (centre) told me his tale of the incest lovers. (See Ikeikinni and Kupa-runni")





Aboriginal children learnt to swim in the cool waters of their tribal lands  
(See "The Curse of the Lily Lagoon")

IKEIKGINNI AND KUPARUNNI

THEY TELL this story of incest in the land of the Tewi people who liken their way of life to a great tree. The base of the tree of life rests on the two opposing great-mothers—Maratdji, the feared one, who lives in the rainbows and the permanent waters of Mountu at the south of Bathurst Island, and the great-mother Kulama, who gives them, through her ritual that is performed at the time when the spear-grass throws its seed, the joy of life and the foods that grow in their country. Out of this mother-earth grows the tree which is an Aramippi or a group of totems all of the same blood-kin. The limbs that grow out from the trunk are the totems and the branches from the limbs are the families. The fruit of the tree is the individual that is born from the whole and the seed from the fruit grows another tree from the family stem.

The Tewi tribe is governed by the law of tradition; clans must hunt in defined boundaries. Kinship laws tell the youth of the tribe whom they shall marry, and their laws are fixed so that no one shall marry into his own 'stem', for that would be what we whites call incest. Those who disobey the laws would certainly be killed by the 'stings' of the ceremonial spears that were given to the tribespeople in Palanari or ancient times, by Tumereka the mosquito.

Young Ikeikginni belonged to the clan that lived and hunted around Atinowinappi (or the swamp-place) out from Cape Fourcroy on Bathurst Island, and she was happy as she gathered the sweet-tasting murungga (potatoes) from the jungles, or the yerwilli toredo-worms from the mangrove places beside the sand-beaches of Binnamutta (or love-apple place).

As a child she hunted with her mother, to be taught how to gather the korka-pods from the cycad-trees, and after they were collected, she was taught how to soak them in fresh water for three days so that the poison in them would be removed and they could be eaten.

The little boys and girls mixed together freely around the cooking-fires of the native women, laughing and playing as they 'ate up big' the grilled cockles mixed with honey, done as only their own mothers could cook them.

Then came that day when Ikeiginni became a Miringaletta, and in the puberty-ritual that followed, she was taught by her mother that as she was now a Muragrabra—firm-breasted-one—she must never mix with her tribal brothers. Listening to her parent's advice, Ikeiginni only smiled, for somehow she was against the tribal law and was already running around with a youth called Kuparunni. She and her tribal brother laughed as they swam in the streams of their land, or hunted in the cool dim spots of the beach jungles.

'They were proper fools,' explained an old Tewi aborigine called Jumalumpowa, when he and I sat on the edge of a laterite cliff at Weoparilli, close to that small indentation in the sea wall at Cape Fourcroy. It was at this spot, according to the myth, where the headman of the Irakapa crocodile totem plunged to his doom in the salt water of the Timor Sea to escape the ceremonial spears of the attacking Mudarti Hawk-clan. The Mudarti had marched out of Melville Island to destroy him and his in a revenge war because they believed the Crocodile people had destroyed a great ritual dog beloved of their clan. 'Young people always think they are too-clever,' went on Jumalumpowa. 'Day-time they follow blackfellow law . . . but night-time bushes (a native saying that means 'wrong-side' or outside the law), but the hunters of our clan soon saw their tracks in the soft sand, and reported it to their father Iramaru. He decided to destroy them for the prestige of the clan . . . but not right for person to kill one of his own 'stem' . . . and real terrible for father to slay his son or daughter.

'Next day, after Iramaru made his vow for killing, he went out hunting with Kuparunni and together they came to a tall tree with a bees' nest high up in its branches and looking upon it the old man said to the younger one, "You are young so climb the tree and cut down that overhanging limb, for it is full up of honey."

'At his father's words Kuparunni went into the bush and, returning with a young green sapling of the cherry-plum tree, he threw this, as a rope, around the long straight honey-tree, and, with his monggwongga (stone-axe) held between his shoulder and chin, he was soon amidst the branches and calling down to ask Iramaru that he point out the exact limb so that he could get at the honey.

'Kuparunni was for cutting the honey-limb along the grain of the wood, as is the custom with the stone-axe, but Iramaru told him to stand on the outer part of the limb and cut into the tree behind him, but at his advice Kuparunni called down.

"If I cut that way father I will be on the outside as the limb come down and I must fall with it."

'Iramaru laughed at his son's words and after calling him a craven fool, he replied that he would give him the sign when the honey-

limb was ready to fall and thus he would be able to climb on to the main tree and be safe.

'So Kuparunni did as he was told, and after cutting a while he heard a crack beneath his feet and calling down to his father, "I hear the tree cracking," he was told to go on with his cutting because the noise he heard was but the wind blowing one limb against another.

'Again came the warning crack from the tree, and at the startled cry from the youth he was again told that it was but the sound made by a hollow rotten tree beside the old man.

'Just after the second crack of the tree, Ikeikginni came running up; she had heard the sound of the tree cutting, and thinking it was her Kuparunni cutting out a honey-nest and giving her a signal as to his whereabouts, she paused in affright at the sight of her father beneath the tree. But the old man, her father, told her not to be afraid and bade her stand under the limb so that she would be able to collect any of the honeycomb that fell from above. Standing as he bade her do, Ikeikginni foolishly defied the taboos as she called aloud to her brother in the tree that he keep some of the sweetest for her. . . .

'Young people are fools,' sadly commented Jumalumpowa. 'They think they know everything. . . . Even the old can learn.'

And as Ikeikginni called to her brother the honey-limb broke off with a loud crack, and crying loudly as he fell, the young breaker of the kinship-law crashed with the honey-limb and his axe on his sister and instantly they were transformed into the totemic forms that live upon the Tewi land.

The young man Kuparunni symbolizes the climbing of the tree as the frill-necked lizard Kupaunni. In this form he tries to hide his shame from the Tewi hunters by using the trunk of the tree as a shield to protect him from their wrathful gaze. Above him, in the branches, or crying from above, is the black cockatoo Ikeikginni, calling for her incest lover and warning the girls of the tribe of their fate should they follow, as she did, the 'wrong-side way of life'. High above them all, as the head-man of the kinship-law, is the wedge-tailed eagle Iramaru, seeking to destroy those who are careless or will not obey the laws of man and nature that control the Tewi tribe.

'We have plenty stories like that one,' old Jumalumpowa concluded as we looked out to sea where the big tide-rips of Cape Fourcroy raced by, 'everywhere good stories in my land, but,' here the old elder sadly shook his head, 'the towns take away our youth, and the mission people make us think different-way. . . . One time the old people were the law, but now the young people just laugh at

we, and no more listen . . . reckon we are just silly and our stories rubbish ones too . . . I can't make it out.'

From overhead we heard the raucous cry of the black cockatoo and at its cry Jumalumpowa added, 'Mission people at Weo all-time follow right law for marry. Only blackfellow in town go wrong-way and marry like wallaby in scrub.'

A STORY FROM GOOSE-EGG TIME

THE SEEDS of the *Tiarri* grass were showing in the bush and all nature sang its song in the swamp-lands; there the magpie-geese gathered on the lily lagoons of the Finness River. It was the month of February and the middle of 'wet-weather-time', when the long lines of geese come honking through the skies to settle in for their breeding season. The mating birds trod down the reeds above the water in readiness for their nests and the rearing of their chicks. With the birds came the tribespeople from around, eager to greet their friends upon the sand-beaches of their land and to share with them the gifts that came from the food-spirits of the tribe.

From my camp beneath a shady beach tree I could see the native women preparing some of the early rice-seeds from the grasses they had freshly gathered from the swamp-lands. Watching them at their work I could discern how nature had shown to them the only method they knew of reaping the grain from the green rice stems.

Knowing nothing about the art of threshing out the grain from the ripened plant, they had, in the beginning, gathered up the grains from the earth after a bush fire had burnt up the dried rice-grass.

Firstly would come the burning at the 'burnt-grass-time', followed by strong winds of the 'cold-weather-time' that swept away the charred grass stem and the burnt ashes. Now after this winnowing by nature the earth would be grey from the grains of rice, and these would be gathered, ground and cooked as meal-cakes on their camp-fires.

And now, from my banyan shade, I watched the native women as they assisted nature with the rice gathering. Up from the wet swamps they came, each carrying large bundles of the green rice-grass, and this they spread out in the sun so that it would dry quickly. After the drying, the grass bundles would be stacked on a piece of clean, hard ground and the lot fired. After it had burnt down, the ashes would be winnowed so that the wind would blow away the residue and the grains of rice would fall back on to the bark winnowing-sheets which the women held.

While watching them I saw one of the aboriginal hunters bring in a freshly-killed wallaby which he hung up in his camp-shade

where it was surrounded by a swarm of blow-flies. For a minute or two he brushed away the pests, then in despair he walked over to a green jungle tree that swarmed with green tree-ants. He plucked off one of the large nests of these savage insects and broke it open over his kill. As he did so I heard the children, who were all clustered around him, laugh with excitement as they watched the enraged green-tree ants swarm over the blood-stained creature to attack and seize the blow-flies that kept flying on to the meat in a hopeless battle of survival.

And there, amidst the smell of roasting goose-eggs and the laughter of children, a young woman called Ngulwun retold to me the story of how a greedy boy, at goose-egg-time, caused many people to die in a big flood that made the islands in the salt water sunrise way.

Muradja was the head-man of the goose-swamp area and he was always happy when he made the big goose-smoke signals on the swamp-plains that called in the tribespeople to the feasting and ritual-barter chants that went on at that time of the year.

Ngulwun told me of how the incoming families gathered, 'All-a-same we mob today'; everywhere was laughter as they recounted their adventures from the time of the last egg gathering and great was the voice of the song-man as he gave them the news.

Each day the families would go out to gather in the eggs, for in the beginning the goose-nests were plentiful and the eggs freshly laid. But let the chicks show big within the shell and give the sign that warned the elders the laying season was nearly over, then on would go the taboos that forbade the youth of the tribe eating the eggs for fear of the deadly poison that would kill them should they disobey the elders' law. Living thus in a society that protected the aged by magic taboos, the old men feasted on as the young people hunted in the jungles and beaches for wallaby and the fish that abounded in the seas of that part. The youthful aborigines always admired the aged ones who had knowledge of what was right and what was wrong.

'But no matter everything go good,' remarked Ngulwun, 'something always happens that make everybody unhappy . . . proper big trouble this time was Muradja's son Windjedda . . . that kid proper cheeky-one.'

Windjedda was different from the other native children. His was a selfish and greedy disposition that was caused, so one old woman of the tribe claimed, not from his make-up, but directly from his mother, who must have eaten too much rich foods whilst he was in her body, and this would naturally make him lazy and greedy when he was born. Other old women disagreed with this finding, claiming that greed was caused by giving him water to drink whilst he was on

the breast. 'Everybody know that right,' learnedly observed Ngulwun. 'When kid get water when on milk then they get two bellies and must get greedy.'

Everything went well with the feasting till the young chicks appeared and the taboos were laid upon the youth of the tribe, but Windjedda, always greedy and disobeying the tribal laws, asked an old woman for one of the eggs she was cooking. When she refused his request he broke one of the eggs over his head and ran to Muradja in tears with the story that he had been defiled.

When he saw what had been done to his son Muradja was very angry. Without calling a council of elders, as is the custom of the tribes with these matters, he picked up a reed-spear and trailing this upon the beach he sped along the sea-shores of the goose-swamp area, with Windjedda laughing behind him. As they ran the salt water of the ocean came creeping in over the beaches to cover the once dry land.

Seeing this newly formed rising tide that came over the reed-spear trail, the terrified natives fled before its magic and, climbing a large banyan-tree at a place called 'Doin', they called loudly for help as Muradja drew the tide around them so that it passed over their heads and they were drowned.

And as they died Muradja was transformed into the blue heron that always runs and fishes before the rising tides. It is he who leads in the waters over the beach-sands, and near him is the youthful Windjedda seeking the food that comes in on the rising tides swirling in from the islands he made on the foreshore of the Timor Sea.

## THE STORY OF A RED CLOUD

OUR LIVA-LIVA (log canoe) lay still upon a sea that rose and fell to the swell that came in from the open water beyond. Below me I could see the many coloured sea-anemones of the coral reef swaying back and forth with each movement of the sea; amidst them, in the crystal depths, myriad fish of every colour glided, blending with the other sea creatures on the coral floor.

Kumbolo, of the Udwardja tribe, pointed down with a fish-spear from his vantage place at the head of the canoe, and following the line of his pointer, I could see a bottle-blue jellyfish drifting by with its attendant pilot fishes which were protected only in order to lure other fish to their doom in the jellyfish's poisonous tentacles that trailed below and around its decoys.

So we drifted on till we came to a place of dried coral before a sandy spit, and as we fished with our lines in the deep holes of the reef, Kumbolo informed me that this was the place of the sacred clam-shell whose destruction caused a red cloud to drift over the land to destroy the people of that time. Knowing that the aborigines attribute all sickness to some form of magic, and that many strange races must have drifted down from the north-west over the ages and so brought epidemics with them, I asked for the legend and as we fished he obliged.

A long time ago, a hunter called Inetina was spearing fish on this large reef beside which we now fished, and as he walked between the deep coral pools he heard an angry voice call his name.

Turning quickly, in an attitude of defence, he beheld a large open clam-shell, and within its depths was the angry face of a human being. As Inetina looked upon it in amazement the thing spoke angrily.

'I am the head-man of your tribe, yet you stabbed at my shell with your spear as you went by . . . you are a fool to act as only a woman would do.'

At that terrible insult of being classed as a woman, Inetina picked up a large stone and hurling it with all his might he drove it into the creature's mouth, and as it died a great red cloud came out of the sea and closed in upon the land.

'Everywhere sickness,' explained my narrator. 'Everybody died in their camps and on the hunt; their bones lay white over the land as does the dried coral on the reefs of the shores . . .

'And when the red cloud drifted away only two people were alive of all the tribe . . . a young man and his sister. . . . By proper black-fellow law they cannot marry, but a spirit from a dead one's shade came to the pair in the night and told them that for the tribe to survive they must have a family . . . so that brother and sister became man and wife and their children formed our present Udwadja tribe.'

## HOW THE DINGO-MAN LOST HIS HEAD

THE MARA aborigine Dingle told me this short myth when we were camped on a sandy reach of the Roper River to cook a scrub wallaby and grill some fish and fresh-water crocodile eggs on the coals of our fire. We had just caught the fish in the running waters of the stream and the eggs we had dug out of the sand beside our camp-place.

A man of the Dingo-totem met his friend of the Native-cat totem at a beach-place called Weakeba, a native camping site north of the Roper River where it flows into the Gulf of Carpentaria.

'You look young, my friend,' he greeted him. 'As you are a lot older than I, why is that?'

'I have discovered the secret of eternal life,' replied the other. 'I can be reborn because I have found a thing called faith.'

'What is faith?' anxiously enquired the Dingo-man, who was always seeking the things possessed by others.

'Faith is a belief that we know where we are going,' answered the other.

At those strange words the Dingo-man asked to be shown that wondrous thing, and the Native-cat man replied by putting his neck on to a log of wood, remarking as he did, 'Cut off my head and bury it away from my body, then see what happens.'

The Dingo-man did as he was told and three days later he heard a voice call his name. Looking upwards he saw his Native-cat friend sitting in the western sky, and as he looked, the reincarnated one came down to his friend by way of a tall tree that reached to the stars. On reaching the earth he remarked to his friend that that was his secret of eternal life; 'I can never die now for to me is faith.'

At his words, the Dingo-man asked to be treated the same way, claiming, as he laid his head on the log of wood, that faith was his also and he did not wish to die.

So the Native-cat man cut off the head of his friend and buried it as the law demanded, and the three days went by as is the law of the Moon-man, but that one without faith never arose from the earth as did his friend.

Thus were the two men transformed into animals. The Dingo to hunt and die and always live close to the earth. The Native-cat, with its moon-spotted skin to live in trees and show the tribes-people the way to bury their dead if they had faith and sought reincarnation.

## THE CURSE OF THE LILY-LAGOON

**F**ROM A vantage point beneath a shady white-cedar tree on the bank of a large lagoon I could see Gumajun of the Nulakun tribe teaching the little children of the Guniar clan the art of swimming. The kiddies stood naked before her up to their waists in the shallow waters of the broad pool which was covered with the blue and white water-lilies that provided the tribe with its stable diet. At the black-woman's call of 'Kulpidja', each child would hold its hand over its nose and bob its head beneath the clear waters. Then all would be still until Gumajun clapped her hands together beneath the water, and at that signal the little laughing heads would pop up again in a swirl of foam. Eagerly they shouted for more.

The scene was a common one in this country of large rivers and lagoons. These provided the main source of food for the tribes-people, a food that could only be gathered by swimming or diving into the deep clear waters. It was part of the lessons of every child of the tribe to overcome fear of water.

Gumajun's little act was the first lesson, and after the children had become used to staying beneath the water they were taken out into the deeper waters by their mothers. After giving them the word 'Kulpidja' (or 'Down') Gumajun would dive into the deeper waters and swim around among the long lily-stems as she showed them how to gather the food for their daily needs. Now and then, as they swam along, she would smile at the children to give them the confidence they needed.

So the lessons went on until the final one when she released them in the deep water to watch them swim upwards, like giant frogs; reaching the surface the youngsters would fill their lungs with air and descending to their mothers they would become another water-baby of the tribe.

It was in their land, which was filled with magic lore such as that of the 'Djul-djul' water-snakes that suckled the breast milk from a nursing-mother who had disobeyed the strict taboos of the clans, and of the magic water-woman who lived in the lily-lagoons to lure the love-lorn youths of the tribe to their doom, that old Milwarra spun me a tale of his early youth. A dream perhaps, who knows. A tale of:

## THE CURSE OF THE LILY-LAGOON

'Twas a moonlight night and a misty veil  
Hung over the lily-lagoon.  
Old Bandar had finished a dream-time tale  
Of the moon and the curlew-woman's wail;  
The women laughed as the children cried  
And the song-man beat with a song-man's pride  
Beside the deep lily-lagoon.

'Twas a night of madness, or was I mad  
As I walked by the lily-lagoon;  
Around me was gladness, yet I was sad,  
I craved those things my elders had;  
Children and wives, a camp-fire bright.  
Laughter and song going into the night,  
Beside the deep lily-lagoon.

But I was weary and left them all  
To walk by the lily-lagoon.  
I trod me down where the blossoms fall  
From woollybutt trees where the mopokes call  
—A sharp low hoot drifting off the breeze—  
To their distant mates in the paper-bark trees  
Beside the deep lily-lagoon.

Then out on the water I heard her call,  
My bride from the dark lagoon!  
So I cast my spears where the ferns are tall  
And crept where the reeds stand tight as a wall;  
I drew them aside, and saw as a dream  
Some water-girls dance by the moonlight's gleam—  
They danced on the dark lagoon.

And as I listened a wild sweet song  
Came out from the lily-lagoon.  
First low, then rising as gales rush along,  
'Twas voices of madness, crushing and strong  
That drew at my soul . . . I dived in the pool,  
And my hot flesh danced as it smote the cool  
Dark waters of that lagoon.

I swam where the long green lilies rise  
From the bed of the deep lagoon,  
Till a blinding light flashed into my eyes,  
Bright as that light when a Sky-man flies  
With burning brand through the sky at night—  
And stricken with madness I swam to a light  
In the magical deep lagoon.

I cried aloud as I saw her there  
Deep down in that lily-lagoon,  
Covered with lily-stems, stroking her hair,  
Chanting a charada—strange magic air  
That tore at my flesh. She sat there alone  
So I swam to claim this girl as my own,  
My wife from the lily-lagoon.

She moved towards me, I held her hand  
And we went from that lily-lagoon.  
Together we wandered the hills of my land,  
We bathed in its pools, we slept on its sand.  
And happy was I, and happy were we.  
My girl of the lilies was once more free  
From the curse of the lily-lagoon.

Oh lizard and bird came soft at her call,  
As we went from that deep lagoon.  
Fat possums came down from the timbers tall,  
And under the shade where sweet figs fall  
We feasted and laughed. Oh! happy were we  
Gathering honey and fruit from the tree  
Away from that lily-lagoon.

One day as we camped by a banyan-tree  
Not far from that lily-lagoon,  
And the banyan-tree above our bed  
Led straight to the stars and moon o'erhead.  
They lowered a rope . . . I opened my eyes  
To see my water-wife move to the skies  
Going back to the lily-lagoon.

Then I cried to the skies, 'This girl is mine,  
My wife from the lily-lagoon.'  
I searched the tree but of her no sign;  
I heard birds call from a lonely pine

That sighed with me as I stood alone  
With flesh as water, my heart a stone  
As I cursed the lily-lagoon.

Then I heard a call and swift as the breeze  
I dived in the deep lagoon.  
I struggled and plunged by kadjebut-trees,  
Soft mud in the bed crept over my knees,  
As I heard loud laughter come from the pool.  
I cried 'She is mine!' and they answered, 'Fool!  
Go back from this lily-lagoon!'

Then a darkness came as I closed my eyes  
And slept in that deep lagoon;  
And I woke to the clansmen's wailing cries,  
And heard the story from Bandar the wise,  
How water-girl's magic, helped by the moon,  
Had trapped me with weeds in that lily-lagoon,  
The curse of the lily-lagoon.



PART FOUR

TALES OF CONTACT

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THE FOLLOWING stories are those told around the camp-fires of the aborigines and refer to their adventures in contact with our way of life. They are about the recurring clash with our society, and nearly all are about their tribal laws or way of life and what actually happens to those aborigines who have forgotten the tribal laws which once controlled their lives. The story of 'Blackfellow Way' tells the tale of a people who had changed over to our way, but who in times of need reverted back to the old customs to help them in their savage struggle to survive. The tale of 'Tribal Law' explains the lot of the half-caste in his own tribe.

## BLACKFELLOW WAY

OLD MIRAWONG was explaining to me the origin of the bark-canoe as recorded in their legends. We were sitting near a pile of creamy chips that had almost leaped out from the tribesmen's iron axes as they hewed out a dug-out canoe from a leichhardt-tree. The scene was noisy with birds, as the feathered songsters were looking for the nectar-laden blooms among the fallen giant's leaves.

'Long time ago,' he began as he made himself comfortable on one of the branches of the tree, 'two men with their families stood upon a sea-shore and looked over a big sea, and looking, they thought to themselves, "What is on the other side? . . . more better we find a way to go and see."'

At first they gathered some logs together, but the tides were too strong for them, and as they were arguing about another method, one of their wives said, 'More better you make a floating thing from bark like the bark dishes we have for carrying our food when we are hunting.'

At her words the two men went into the bush and picked out a tall tree that had nice bark, and with a stone-axe they cut the bark at the bottom of the tree, and then with a long forked pole they climbed high up the tree and cut the bark in the way they had at the bottom. Their women now showed them how to remove the bark with a pointed digging-stick, and when the sheet was off they put it over a fire to make it soft as the women did when making bark dishes. When all was ready they had their first big trouble, for the elder man wished to make the canoe as it lay on the tree, but the younger one objected, saying that a sea-hawk had come to him in a dream and warned him that the inner side of the bark must be the outside of the canoe.

But the elder man won in the argument, and when the canoe was finished with the rough part of the bark outside, they put it in the water and straightway it went to the bottom and 'close up everybody get drowned'.

Then the younger man made a canoe his way with the sap of the bark outside and everybody was happy as it floated on the water and carried the families to safety.

'But that elder man was very angry,' commented Mirawong, 'he

was very wild because the other man was right and in the big fight that followed they both died. . . .'

Mirawong broke off his tale to point at two fish-hawks that drifted about on the wind current as they searched the surface of the sea for fish. Then he continued: 'That white sea hawk is the elder man who made the canoe the wrong way, and that one with red-brown feathers on back is the one who gave us the canoe.' Then turning his back on the sea, Mirawong pointed out to me a tall woollybutt-tree with orange-coloured blooms among its leaves, and remarked, 'That is the tree they fought over, and now it stands to show us the right way . . . the bottom of the trunk with the rough bark outside was cut by the white sea-eagle, the clean top half of the tree was the sheet taken away by the red-backed sea-eagle who made his canoe the right way.'

'But why no bark canoe now?' I questioned the old story-telling canoe-maker. 'Why all this work for wood canoe?'

'Wood canoe is the best one,' he answered. 'Can't sink down when full up water, and it is proper strong for big sea.'

He paused as though an incident from the past had revived his memory, and there, surrounded by the chips of his half-completed canoe, he told me a story of his childhood and the testing of his father Jalnuk.

'When I was a little kid,' began Mirawong, 'my father Jalnuk and my mother Nymil with my little sister Yemma lived in the swamp-lands of the Pongi-pongi; that place was our hunting lands and we were happy till the White and Chinese people came out looking for the gold and tin-stone of that part. At first only a few came, but gradually they became as thick as the mosquitoes of the lily-lagoons in the rain-time. When that happened my father took our family to work for a big government man in town, and there we had a good time as we wandered among the houses of the white-fellow man.'

'The white boss my father worked for gave us plenty tucker, and the missus and children gave us kids lollies when we helped them in garden. In that town was a proper mission-man who taught us kids school and all-time we sing about his God that came to help us black people.

'Everybody happy at first, but too much town been spoil us. My father and mother been too much drink grog and smoke opium, and us children forgot how to hunt bush-tucker. From proper good bushmen we became real rubbish ones all-a-same nothing.

'But sometime, when my father not too drunk, he get real sorry for bush life, and one day, when a little red flower came on to the rope-tree in cold-weather-time, my mother and we been cry-cry

no-more little-bit for the fish and yams of our country, so straight away my father buy an old rubbish one canoe from his uncle and we paddle that thing back to country longa sand-beach way.

'We were properly happy as we go away from that town and see once more the birds and trees of our bushland. It was good to dig up the turtle-eggs out of the sand. . . . But soon trouble.'

The sea was calm and a heavy dew lay over the land as Jalnuk called to his son Mirawong to bring him the old jam-tin he carried so that he could put in another handful of ghost-crabs—used by his family when fishing on the outer reefs and islands of their tribal shore-lines.

'We no more hunt proper-way like before,' sadly said Mirawong. 'Too much town make everybody mad longa head, and everything we got now was only rubbish from whitefellow-man.'

'Rubbish from whitefellow-man'; I knew what the old storyteller meant by those words, for I too had witnessed the gradual decay of the tribespeople when they contacted town life and ceased to weave and manufacture the neat artifacts of their tribe. Old and badly-cut canoes with bits of bag and rotten calico for sails. Pieces of driftwood, picked up on the beaches and hastily cut into paddles, displaced the well-trimmed ones of olden times. Even their bark-dishes, for carrying purposes, had been neglected for our tin receptacles, and the art of making bush ropes and string from the fibres of trees and grass had passed into the limbo of forgotten things in face of the competition from the fishing-lines and dugong ropes purchased from the local stores in town.

Even the walkabouts to their tribal lands were of less duration as the craving for town life was greater, and, so Mirawong told me, his father and mother were already making excuses for returning to town to help their boss and send the kiddies to school.

Old Jalnuk had already told them that after their day of gathering eggs on an outer island he would return, and now, from the beach-place where he and his son were gathering the bait for the day's fishing, he could see his wife and daughter rolling up the rags that made up their swags, and getting together the bags and tins which carried their supplies as they travelled around.

Jalnuk's intention was to paddle his wooden canoe out to the sandy islet of Mumru, to fish from its coral reefs and gather up eggs from the many turtle nests on its beaches. With a good supply of these, he would then sail back to town, and great would be his boasting as he handed them around to his friends who belonged to 'too much town', as Mirawong called it.

It was a good day to go to sea. The small beads of dew clinging to the grass stems and dancing in the morning sun told Jalnuk that

the fierce south-east winds of the 'cold-weather-time' had eased a little, and in the break, the old man—following the tradition of the tribal hunters—decided that the time was ripe for him to breast the tide-rips of Merin, a cape to the north. Once their canoe was clear of this, the tide-race would carry his craft the few remaining miles to the egg-island.

His canoe, named 'Tultee' by his uncle after his deceased father, who was buried in the bush where it was hewn out, was riding on an anchor made from a piece of old iron attached to the craft by a length of rope he had purchased at the sea-port store. Jalnuk called, and at his command his family moved towards it as he looked up reassuringly at the sky above him.

Their needs for the trip were few. Water and food was in plenty on the island. After their few belongings had been stowed in the canoe, they clambered aboard. Jalnuk pulled on the paddle. 'I been pull longa anchor rope,' said Mirawong, 'and that "Tultee" been swing out longa sea.' Nymil and Yemma made themselves comfortable in the middle of the craft, and with an old blanket thrown over their shoulders to keep them warm, and eyes fixed ahead, they were soon over the Merin rip and heading westwards for Mumru island.

'Halfway to Mumru something been go wrong,' Mirawong remarked as he shook his shaggy head. 'My father been savee something not right. . . .' Then out of the tale he told me I could visualize the scene of their plight.

Jalnuk sensed that something had gone wrong with the tribal lore about the dew on the grass, and bitterly he cursed his lack of knowledge as he felt the wind change to their beam, and saw, arising as by magic, small wisps of cloud hurtling overhead like fluff of kapok-pods when released from their fruit in the strong breeze, and the old man could tell that a dreaded 'morning-glory' storm was sweeping upon them.

Knowing it was dangerous to turn back towards the shore with its strong tide-race and choppy sea, he pulled strongly on his paddle, hoping to reach the shelter of Mumru before the weather became too bad. Snap! The handle broke in his hand. He cursed bitterly. Cursed because he had not made his paddle from the wood used by his forbears. Casting the useless thing aside, he grasped the lighter paddle Mirawong handed him, and with this he tried to keep the canoe in motion.

Wind swept on them with a howling roar that spun the wave tops over the canoe floundering in the ever-rising swell. Useless to seek the shelter of Mumru now, for it lay too far over on their beam, and he knew he could never reach it in these terrible tide-rips that

hissed and roared around them as they rolled along. In such a sea the slightest mistake would sweep them out of the canoe. Jalnuk knew he must somehow keep old 'Tultee' into the wind to ride out the storm.

'We been all dead fright,' said Mirawong. 'Big sea been come up from side, and as it went right over we, my father been sing-out "Bail out water", as he jumped from our canoe into the sea, and by using his swimming body as a storm-anchor he held that old "Tultee" nose into the big sea.'

'We been all naked now,' continued Mirawong, 'for, as my father jump in water my mother told us children to throw away our clothes, and as old Jalnuk hold that canoe steady we throw out the sea water with tins, anything, to make it ride light one.'

How long Jalnuk remained in the water as a human sea-anchor, Mirawong could not remember, nor did he care. Wave after wave came surging upon them, and as the sea poured into the canoe Nymil and the children tossed it back into the sea.

Like a cork, 'Tultee', built from the light timbers of the mainland, bounced on the waves; Jalnuk, still holding her into the wind, called encouragement to all as they bailed out the sea water with ceaseless rhythm. A rain storm, rarely seen in the cold months of June, added to their misery, but flattened the sea down a little and gave them some fresh water to quench their thirst; noting this Jalnuk clambered aboard to see if he could get some life back into legs numbed by the sea.

He smiled to himself when he heard his family, huddled under the wet blanket, singing a chant that would keep the sea calm. He smiled because he realized the chant would carry their minds away from the terror that was about them. They had reason to fear, he thought, for who knew where they were going with this constantly changing wind? And now that the sun was obscured by clouds, he himself was hopelessly lost.

Daylight slowly faded. Night closed in. Helpless and weary Jalnuk fell into a light sleep, crouched in the rising and falling prow of 'Tultee'.

Thus bailing, sleeping and chanting Jalnuk's family rode out that terrible storm. Just as dawn-light was breaking, they saw before them a low small island behind a swirl of foam, which told them too plainly of an outer reef betwixt them and the shore. It was useless to try to paddle away from the approaching danger. Jalnuk knew that now was the time for the final testing of 'Tultee'.

Swiftly they neared the reef. Calling on the spirit of his dead uncle's father—whose shade-spirit lived where this canoe had been cut, and who might be with them now—Jalnuk steered his craft down a

roaring swell that burst in a foam over the reef. He could hear Nymil and his children chanting. As 'Tultee' rushed forward amidst the yeasty foam, they threw aside the old blankets.

Now the frail craft rose to the roaring surf. For a moment Jalnuk could see the sharp outlines of the land ahead; then they went down into the trough of the sea above the reef. Bang! The wooden canoe shuddered as it struck flat on the reef in the trough of the wave. Above the roar of the surf Jalnuk could hear Nymil yelling to her children to hold tight to the sides of the canoe. In a daze he also obeyed his wife's command as a wave broke over them. With a piece of the broken wooden canoe clutched in his hands, Jalnuk rose in a swirl of foam and was swept along to the calmer waters of the lagoon.

'When my mother been sing out to we children,' said my excited story-teller, 'everybody been hang on to that old one canoe . . . can't let go . . . no matter water longa everywhere and me close up lose wind in that salt water me must hold on till I come out into calm water behind that reef . . . No more long time and we all in that quiet water and as we all float together in that calm place I hear my father call out good-fellow-way longa that "Tultee" that is nothing now, but it been break up right way to save it's countrymen when they have big-trouble.'

So Jalnuk gathered his family around him in the quiet lagoon waters, and bidding them swim with him as a human raft, they splashed and shouted as they swam ashore, so that the predatory creatures of the reef would keep away, and in this way they swam to the sandy beach where they lay exhausted upon the warm sands.

'We been wake up and find we got nothing . . . no clothes . . . knife, axe, canoe, calco, tucker, water, match . . . nothing . . . we more worse than bush-blackfellow when whitefellow been find him first time . . . that father belong to we had never seen this island before, and don't know which way country . . . that island got no tracks of blackfellows. Before we were like white people in town now we were like wallaby that sit down nothing only grass and tree.'

Nothing but grass and trees on the island. Jalnuk had walked all over the small island whilst his family had slept. He saw no foot-prints of human beings or marks on the trees or sand to tell him that they sometimes visited this place. Turtle-egg nests were abundant on the beaches, and in some places he could see where they had been dug up by goannas. He cut across the island and in a short while was on the opposite beach. He noticed the sandstone was similar to that used for sharpening weapons in his own country.

He saw red tough clay and tall messmate-trees—useful for huts and bark-canoes—and in a small beach jungle he came across the red and yellow hibiscus-trees that were useful in making string and rope, and everywhere he could see the pandanus whose long green frond-like leaves gave to his tribesmen the dilly-bags and mats so useful for carrying food in the hunt or sleeping on at night.

He passed through some very old and large salmon-gum trees on a red gravel ridge, and in the centre of the island he came upon a lagoon-like depression; but, although he dug with a sharp-pointed stick in many places, he could find no water. So he returned to his family on the beach.

Nymil had already reverted back to the old-time custom of making a fire by twirling a stick between the palms of her hand on a base of the same wood, and on the ashes of the fire he could see small white balls which told him plainly that his wife and the children were cooking, and drinking the fresh water that could always be found in half-hatched turtle-eggs.

As he sat down beside them, and drank of the meagre water supply and dined off the flesh at the same time, he heard Nymil tell the children of how the fire-making method was first brought into the tribes by the Hawk-people, after the Dingo-people had rubbed until their hands changed into paws, and their jaws became swollen after they had eaten some bitter-tasting yams that had transformed them into the present-day dingo.

Smiling to himself as he listened to this ancient way of carrying on the tradition of his people and at the same time instructing the children of how the thing was done, he waited for his wife to finish, then he told her of his wanderings and his findings. When he came to the part about the large salmon-gum trees and some possum scratches he had seen on the trunks, Nymil became excited and told him of how an old black man had recounted to her parents of how these trees were always searched in the dry-lands of his country for the water that was stored in their hollow trunks.

‘So we all get up and go out to that water-tree place, and my mother been look for water,’ said Mirawong as he explained how Nymil first peeled the bark from a spot on one side of the tree then did the same thing on the opposite side. Then she placed her ear to the exposed trunk and gave the other side a sharp rap with a stone. ‘If water, mother told us, then that hit with the stone will make the water inside jump about and it was easy to hear by the echo it made.’

‘Two tree, my mother been try,’ remarked Mirawong, ‘then I look at her face and see proper smile and we all happy when we hear her say, “Water here”.’

Nymil then knocked off a small knot of wood lower down the trunk, my informant explained, and in the place where it was she made a small hole with a sharp-pointed stick, and instantly a small jet of water began to flow on to the earth. She stopped the flow with a wooden plug, after first showing them how to put a smaller stick in the hole to lead the water into a bark dish or shell water-carrier.

'My mother was properly swell-up-rib (proud) for finding that water, and straight away my father went to the salt water and, as it was low tide, he found a big bailer-shell and this he filled up with water for our camp; we were now properly happy . . . properly happy.' The memory made Mirawong proud and he filled up his wooden pipe with tobacco and pressed a red-hot coal from the fire into its improvised bowl of bent tin.

Jalnuik put Nymil in charge of the water-trees after warning the children that a big sickness would come upon them if they went near the spot. They made a windbreak of bushes around their camp-fire and after a feed of oysters and crabs that they had gathered on the outer reefs they lay on the sand to sleep.

Next day, Jalnuik's first job was to make tools and weapons for the hunt. He searched the beaches of the island for some article that may have come ashore from the canoe, or a piece of driftwood with iron in it that may have come in from some distant wreck or civilized shoreline, but his search was in vain, so he turned back to the bush and reef for the articles he required. A spear for hunting fish on the outer reefs was constructed from a thin sapling—which was first heated on his fire then straightened on his knee—as a haft, with two hardwood spear-points barbed inwards to hold the fish, and this was fastened on by grass string that was made by Nymil and Yemma, and the lot held fast by a wax that Jalnuik made from the burnt root of an ironwood-tree that grew on the island. The trimming of the hardwood spear-points was done on sandstone, and the barbed edges were cut with a razor-shell that he had gathered on the reef. A large one he made for himself and then he fashioned a smaller one for Mirawong. As he made these Nymil was busy at making a hardwood digging-stick, which she trimmed the same way, then hardened by charring it in the camp-fire, as was the custom of her people in the past.

When in the beach jungle Jalnuik came across a tall straight kapok-tree and going around its trunk he tested the soft wood with the sharp-pointed digging-stick he carried, and digging at it he knew that in the shaping of that tree lay his only hope of getting away from their island prison.

That evening Jalnuik talked it over with his family, and next day, eager to begin their big task, they searched the beaches and reefs for

sharp-edged hand stones that could be used for cutting-tools. On the reef Jalnuk found a water-worn piece of clam-shell that had been ground smooth by the action of the waves, and its shape instantly brought to his mind the stone-axes of his elders, so he improvised a tommyhawk-head from it and bound it on to a piece of green wood with a base of beeswax and string made from twisted hair that had been supplied by his family. Nymil had told him that that was the material required for the binding.

Jalnuk knew that the work of making a canoe would take a long time, and after shaping, it must lay in the shade of the jungle so that it would lose its moisture and so float like a cork on the water.

'We were all very happy now as we started to work on things that would enable us to get home once more,' explained Mirawong. 'No matter naked and got nothing longa finger, our mother and father told us that everything there on that island and only slow and sure work would get us away . . . my father and me been hard work on that canoe.'

Their method of felling the tree was to hack it a little with the clam-shell axe, then in that cavity a small fire would be lit to char and soften the tree so that it would cut easier. 'No matter slow way,' commented Mirawong, 'we no more think about time like white people but just work easy-way and then, one day, that tree been come down and lay longa ground.'

So the days on the island went by and each person completed their allotted section of the work. As Jalnuk and Mirawong hacked away at the canoe-tree Nymil and the little girl Yemma gathered the inner bark of the hibiscus-tree and after soaking it in water, then beating the stuff between stones, they teased it out, then twisted it into lengths of string betwixt their palms and thighs; or if rope was required they laid a larger strand on a trimmed stick and when two such lengths were made they twisted them together hand over hand.

From the water-tree place Nymil and Yemma trailed possum marks up the trees and pulled them out of their hollows by the ancient method of thrusting in the jagged end of a stick. After twirling this around on the creature's body so that its fur was entangled with the ends of the stick, they would gently pull it out till they could reach in with their hands and so beat it to death. With the fur, plucked from the creatures' bodies before cooking them on the coals of the camp-fire, they made possum-string with a primitive spindle of a forked stick spun between their fingers or on their thighs, and this was fashioned into pubic-aprons and tassels on a crude loom made with two upright sticks driven into the earth.

Thus the days and the months went by. Slowly the camp place became a litter of things that had been made as gifts to their kins-

people when they returned, and often in the cool of the afternoon, Jalnuk's family would be down at the canoe-cutting place, and there, under his orders, they levered out large cuts of the soft wood with special sharp-pointed levering sticks, and great would be their talk as they discussed the future.

'That big wood canoe took long time and it was slow work, but my father and me all day chip . . . chip . . . chip with stick and stone proper good work for we been do something,' happily said Mirawong as he relived the scene. 'First time we cut it on the inside, and when it look right we two-fellow rub . . . rub . . . rub with sandstone till it look proper pretty and smooth one. Then when inside finished we cut it on outside so that it look like canoe, and more again we rub that thing with sandstone till it proper clean one . . . everybody work, work . . . can't stop . . . proper good time.'

'Each day same thing,' continued Mirawong. 'In morning go out with father to hunt on reef as Nymil and Yemma go to get water from trees and dig out bush potato in jungle. After that we all make something for go-away-time.'

Pandanus leaves were gathered and when stripped into thin lengths they were woven into mats and carrying baskets, and tiring of this the women used up the hibiscus string by making dilly-bags and small fishing nets.

'In town we somehow been lose everything,' explained Mirawong, 'but on that island we find everything like old one time, and every night my father and mother tell us proper good stories about our country . . . just like the tales I been tell to you.'

The large dug-out canoe was completed when the first storm of the wet season broke over the island. 'We been cut about . . . no-more-little-bit as the sky water fell down . . . water everywhere, can't finish.'

It was a big storm, and when it finished they discovered it had filled the depression in the centre of the island, and after building for themselves a shelter of bark and grass to protect them from future storms, Jalnuk decided to remove his canoe on to the island lagoon and thus bring it near their beach camp-site in readiness for their homeward journey.

To do this he gathered short lengths of dry wood to act as rollers, and as the dug-out was well dried out at the time and light of weight, they moved it easily with levers of wood, and once on the rollers it was soon in the lagoon—and how they all shouted with glee as they rode it proudly towards the camp, where it was put under a shady tree to protect it from the heat of the sun.

Jalnuk's plan was to await for the big wet season to pass away, and in the interval between it and the cold-weather time that had

caused the storm which drove them on to this island, they would sail back to their own lands in the soft winds that came from sunrise way.

Under the fierce rays of the sun the island lagoon was soon green with strong rush grass and swamp-reeds; these Nymil and Yemma gathered and tied into bundles, which they buried in the sand, and after a few days they took them out, a few at a time, and began to weave a large rush sail of the same pattern as that used for mats and baskets.

Jalnuk made strong paddles, taking a long time over his work, for these he wished to be without weakness and ready to stand up to hard work should they be so required; and both he and his son twisted the stout canoe and sail rope from the fibre that had been collected by the others, and they chanted together their tribal songs as they hunted the reef for conch and bailer-shells that would hold drinking water and bail salt water from the canoe if necessary.

And now, ten months from that day when they came to the island, the light winds blew from the north-east, and with the coming of those trades that would drift them to their country they made ready to depart, by getting together the things required for the journey.

Nymil and the children patrolled the beaches to turn on their backs some of the sea-turtles that came in to lay their eggs; from each they took out the long gut and, after cleaning it well in the salt water, they stuffed it full of the shelled eggs, which were then cooked in the ashes of the fire to produce a long egg-sausage that kept fresh for a long time. They also cooked and dried yams and stowed the dehydrated food into their pandanus baskets, together with cooked dried turtle-meat well wrapped in bark and tied with string. As Nymil did these things she explained to the children that, as a girl, she had seen her people, and those of other tribes, do these things, and out of her memory had she carried on the tradition as she wished her children to do.

How they laughed as they carried aboard the conch-shells full of water and well stoppered with leaves, so that none could spill or be tainted with salt water, and as they brought down the things needed for the trip Jalnuk carefully stowed them away, together with the trade-goods they had made over the days before. Jalnuk even picked up a thin, flat stone that lay on the beach and put this in the centre of the craft as a cooking place, with some firewood and a fire-stick of smouldering pandanus to light a fire, then when all was ready they took a long look at their camp-place, and . . .

'We been properly sorry for leaving that good island that saved us from the sea,' Mirawong remarked as I tried to picture that scene.

Then Jalnuk spoke; they all climbed aboard, and with the rush-sail set on its bush mast, they paddled across the inner lagoon and reef and sailed away to the south before a light breeze.

'That sweet-one wind been kind of sing song to we as we sail back to country,' reminiscently said Mirawong, 'I been put my hand in the water as we go and I was properly good-binji as I rubbed the sides of that good fellow canoe that we been make with stone and stick. My father showed us the star of Manbuk high overhead and we laugh as he tell us once more the tale of the water-girl and the big dry time that made everyone "cry-cry". We cooked on the fire but we only eat little bit, for we were too happy, and we want to keep some of our tucker to show our people when we see them.'

'Middle of the night,' he continued, 'the wind blow little bit strong, but that canoe, which my father been name "Lunggur" after his country, been growl no-more-little bit as he bite into that salt water so that it show like light as it race along. Everything strong on that canoe . . . "all-a-same old time blackfellow way," my father been tell us as we sail . . . and when morning time came we could see grass fires and big smoke ahead, and when we sail close we look-look longa beach and we shout, no-more-little-bit as we call the names of the places that belong to our country. So we sail on and when we get close up we see our countrymen running along the beach to see who was coming in this new one canoe, and straight away Jalnuk and we three-fellow sing proper song for our good fellow country . . . can't beat it . . . too good.'

'Too good,' the old man re-echoed the words as a song of praise and I thought of them sailing in towards the shore where the people made smoke to welcome them in and cried with delight as they took hold of the canoe and saw it held people who had been mourned as dead, but now were cheered in with tears of joy.

'That night we had a big dance,' said Mirawong. 'Jalnuk told the story of our strange trip to the island, and as he did we all-about gave out the baskets and things we made on that place. When we give out our presents to the people we wear no white people's clothes but only the possum "mutta-muttas" that Nymil and Yemma made from the fur of the possums of the island . . . everybody proper happy and say just like old time before white people came to make us different kind.'

Mirawong explained how they could not believe that Jalnuk and he had made their well-cut canoe from an axe made of shell and scooped out and polished with stick and stone. 'They can't understand we made everything on that island that looked like nothing first time, but Jalnuk told them that all-about black people done

everything in the bush long before other people came and everything right if we follow blackfellow way.'

When the big meeting, with its rituals were over, Jalnuk and his family returned to the town. 'That white one boss he been big growl at Jalnuk because they say we run away from job and when my father try tell him right way he won't listen for he say we only tell lie . . . Then when that mission-man ask my father and mother why us children had missed all the school learning that year, Jalnuk straight away answered that 'We had a big holiday on an island and learnt everything blackfellow way.'

'Then that mission-man too been get angry and as they all talk my father and mother been learn one-time that that town was just rubbish, so we went straight down to the beach and we sailed back to our good-one country and learnt blackfellow in bush school.'

As Mirawong finished his story he tossed a newly cut chip from the dug-out canoe at a small honey-eater that warbled nearby. His mind was on the past so we two sat in peace, then he spoke quietly. 'My poor father . . . mother and sister been live in our country till they die . . . they never went back to the town for that island been teach them that bush was everything and town . . .' The old story-teller looked towards me and waved his hand, with the palm upwards, which is their sign-talk that signifies 'nothing'. We looked into each other's eyes, and it was I who broke the silence as I replied:

'All-about your family were proper good ones old man . . . they never lost their country.'

'When blackfellow lose their country they die,' emphatically concluded Mirawong, as he lay back in the shade amidst the chips and chunks of wood from the rough-hewn canoe.



Aboriginal bark canoe makers following the traditional pattern laid down by the sea-hawks of Mirawong's tale. (See "Blackfellow Way")



Aboriginal buffalo shooters at the time of Ringas' tale. (See "Tribal Law")



This old aboriginal man was always ready to tell me a story of past days. (See "Mitjarra's Trick")



Old Wilrandju. (See "Rainbow Business")

## BIG WHITE BOSS

Big white boss him sit in chair,  
Everybody heart-jump when him stare;  
Got red face and he got white suit,  
Long fellow socks and big brown boot.

Girl bring tea and him talk, talk, talk,  
Growl longa people, 'Why no work?'  
Belly as stone when loafer found,  
Sweet-fellow mouth when girl come 'round.

Girl write letter and then him say,  
'Type that out then take away.'  
Everywhere people write, type, write,  
All-time daylight, sometime night.

Letter come in and letter go out,  
Stamp, stamp, stamp on all-about;  
Girl look somewhere; file can't find  
Everybody look-look different-kind.

White man sit in office like fly,  
Work, work, work till him old or die,  
Poor fellow white, me glad I'm black  
When I hear that type thing 'clack, clack, clack'.

TRIBAL LAW

THE BUFFALO-SHOOTING aborigine Ringas and I were sitting in the shade of a clump of bamboo growing beside the large red lotus and blue-lily lagoon of Pundaluk, better known to the white people as 'Wild-boar Billabong' because of the droves of wild pigs that abound in that area.

The shooting-horses that were ridden hard over the swamp-plains to shoot down the racing herds had just been rubbed down; and now, in their bamboo railed yards, they were busy eating the fodder that was brought from the township of Darwin by a sailing lugger which landed it on the banks of the Adelaide River. As they munched away from their nose-bags I watched some native women, stripped to the waist, busy at washing the freshly skinned hides of blood and dirt in the water-hole nearby—cleaning them in readiness for the applications of salt that would preserve them.

Above the laughter of the women as they scrubbed and salted the heavy hides, I could hear the droning of blow-flies that are always attracted to these places by the smell of stale flesh and blood. Overhead came the shrill cry of kite-hawks as they repeatedly swept down to fight over the pieces of meat and fat tossed away by the cleaners, and this, added to the continual cawing of the crows, which pranced in warily to get their share of the food, transformed this spot of beauty to one of death and decay.

The buffalo-shooter Ringas had just handed to me one of the cylindro-conical stones that are found everywhere in this area, and as I handled the flaked artifact (which was not unlike a large sythe-stone) he explained their origin according to the beliefs of his tribe.

'One time my countrymen made and used that stone for magic-song business.'

'How?' I questioned.

'Well,' he answered, 'suppose a man wants to kill another, he does not hunt him down with spear for then everyone would know who was the murderer . . . with this stone everything is different, he do it secret way.'

Ringas went on to explain how the would-be murderer makes or finds one of the killer stones, after which he locates the spot where

the intended victim has eased himself. He then gathers up a small portion of that one's 'gunna' and as he 'sings' his magic killer-song he rubs it on the stone and calls the 'sung-one's name. . . .'

'Well,' continued Ringas, 'he now makes a small fire and when it is burning strongly he puts this stone in the flames and when he does that the "sung-man's shade-spirit" must leave its body to follow the smell . . . no matter long way, that shade-spirit must go as a shade-bird that calls as it goes flying through the night . . . then when that killer-man hear that bird-shade coming he makes a hole in the ground and into this he puts some of the ashes of his fire and this decoys the spirit inside the hole . . . when there the killer-man blocks up the hole with one of these stones and, when that happen, that shade-spirit can't get back to its proper body which must soon get sick and die.'

'You saw this thing?' I asked him, and he replied, 'I saw strong people die when I was little kid, and all-about my people knew that they died from these killer-stones. In this, my country, before white people came an old man who had white hands was a proper singing-man and everybody would give him plenty tucker to keep him happy . . . now too much sickness in this country from white-fellow business and that beat blackfellow killer-stones easy . . . one time my country got plenty people . . . now nothing only this killer-stone that lie everywhere longa ground.'

'Blackfellow different kind,' I told him, and he replied, 'Black people got right law first time, but white people came and made us go wrong way.' He paused awhile then continued as he put one of the magic stones on to the ground beside a bale of hay:

'Long time ago, when I was little kid, a big mob buffalo-shooting blackfellow came to this country from salt water side. Everybody same colour as we and all of them were nice people. The reason they came to our country was because they had killed off the buffaloes in their place and now they were here to help a white man that owned this shooting place, and all day I lived in their camp; eating, at their cook-place, the damper and buffalo tongues they cooked in a big pot over an open fire . . . plenty good tucker, it made me happy and I soon understood their language.'

'Now the boss native man of that buffalo-shooting mob was a black man called Hector and he had a very pretty wife called Doris. All day them people work for their white boss . . . some of the men shoot the buffaloes on horseback and others come behind on foot and leading a packhorse that got no pack-saddle. When these people hear shooting they go that way and skin the dead buffalo and carry the green-hides back to camp for the washing and salting.' He

pointed his head towards the women I had noticed before, then added, 'Like this mob here.'

'Everybody work good way and no trouble till a half-caste called Muraguleki came there from a big white man's school longa south where his father sent him to get good schooling all-a-same white people. That Muraguleki and Hector got one mother but different father, they grew up together in the buffalo shooting camps as little children, both knew same language, but that school been make them think different way.

'Muraguleki got no wife and by blackfellow law brothers in totem line are husbands to each other's wives who are also sisters in the totem line, and suppose I go away then I will leave my wife with my brother who must look after her proper way and treat her as a wife . . . that is blackfellow law,' added Ringas, 'and our law is right.'

'Hector was not a "bad-head" (jealous),' continued Ringas, 'always right for our law he would leave Doris with Muraguleki when he went away and everybody was real glad as they saw that half-caste follow the tribal law . . . but soon everybody get proper sorry for that Muraguleki and they gave to him a very pretty girl called Mirawan and everybody very happy now, for all were level 'gether.

'Not long after that Muraguleki married Mirawan, blackfellow way, that white boss gave him a half share in the shooting camp and now that they share everything—money, tucker, camp—that half-caste get big-head and talk to his people different way.

'But that Doris and Mirawan were good friends and being sisters in totem line they both slept in Hector's camp when that Muraguleki went into town on whitefellow business, and when that half-caste came back one night and found out that his wife had followed blackfellow law, he stole into Hector's camp and made big trouble for nothing.

'Whitefellow school had made him proper mad for woman-business,' sadly commented Ringas. 'I was there longa that camp and I saw Muraguleki come in shouting and straight away he get hold of that poor Mirawan, who can't understand, and he give her a good hiding. . . . Hector can't understand at first but when that half brother of his kick that woman and call her bad name then Hector been call out hard fellow way.

"What all this bad-head business," he shout out. "White man's blood has made you different kind . . . we got same mother but different father . . . when you got no wife you happy for black-fellow law and I never growled when you slept with my wife . . . now that you are big boss for school business you go 'nother way like whitefellow and make trouble for nothing."

"Then that Muraguleki made answer, "My father was big white boss . . . school taught me the right way . . . blackfellow law is wrong."

"Nothing wrong," shouted back Hector. "You think one time like blackfellow when their law give you something for nothing, yet you get bad-head like whitefellow when you must pay back level and right way . . . can't two way . . . must one way . . . what you? With we blackfellow or longa whitefellow?"

'Now that Muraguleki get proper wild—not at Hector but at himself 'cause him fool—but he can't talk sorry-way, only get mad like buffalo bull when wounded, and straight away he wanted to fight his brother who was always so kind to him.'

'Why was that?' I questioned Ringas, who shook his head from side to side as he answered. 'Bad-head people always go different way . . . makes good people into murderer.' He paused awhile then continued, 'Well, that Muraguleki get very angry over everything and he told Hector that white people were the proper bosses here and their law was right.'

'When he said that, that Hector answered, "You wrong brother, our law was right in this country from long time . . . we are only rubbish now because the white people came with the law of gun and jail . . . you are the big boss now because you went to the white-man's school and only talk fight with finger because you learnt that in school. But no more forget brother that it was our hard work with buffalo that made the money that sent you to school. Suppose you want to fight me then you must do it the buffalo-shooter way."

'I was a kid at the time,' said Ringas, 'so I say nothing, just sit in a big banyan tree out from that camp and listen to all-about.'

'Now that two-fellow light up kerosene lamp and go out on to little fellow plain near the camp, and each one got rifle to shoot longa each other like cranky fools. As I look-look I think to meself. "What name this new business," and as I look I hear something walking longa pandanus leaf out in dark place, and when I look that way I see big wounded buffalo shake his head and throw up dust everywhere like him do when very angry.

'Buffalo bull when it is wounded is very cheeky,' went on Ringas, 'and this one, when it saw the lamps and men on the plain just put down its head and raced like like a big rock that rolls down in mountain country . . . proper terrible.

'I wanted to yell out to that two-fellow, but me fright too much. Suppose I call out might be they give me hiding because I been look longa their woman's business, so I just sit in that tree and watch that big bull race straight longa that Hector who saw it, too late, and he only had time to throw away his rifle and hold on to that

bull's horns as it pulled him over the rough ground to where Muraguleki stood with his rifle, but can't shoot as he might hit Hector. . . . My goodness,' exclaimed Ringas as he relived the scene, 'talk about dust when that Muraguleki went to help his brother . . . I can't see anything; all I can see and hear is Doris and Mirawan calling up the other shooting men to come and help, and everywhere I see people running.

'Then I hear a shot,' continued Ringas, 'and when dust clear up I see that big bull dead on the plain, and the two brothers, full up blood as they cry-cry and hold one another like old time blackfellow fashion, and as they staggered away their countrymen came up to carry them back to the camp where Doris and Mirawan looked after them as they lay in the same swag.'

'Did they follow blackfellow law after that,' I asked of Ringas and he answered sadly, 'They followed blackfellow law for helping brother when in trouble, but that Muraguleki can't help being a bad-head over wife business. After that they understand each other and each one follow his own law . . . blackfellow and whitefellow law can't mix.'

As he finished his tale I watched a native shooter go into a stagnant pool to ease himself, and inquiring of Ringas why he did it he replied, 'Blackfellow always do it that way . . . too frightened to do it on dry land for fear old-time doctor-blackfellow will sing magic songs into these,' and he pointed to the flaked and polished cylindro-conical stone at his feet.

'You frightened of them?' I asked him as he touched the stones at his feet. In reply he spat on to the ground, then tossed the salivated lump of earth into the big pool of water and replied, 'Our old people taught us many things . . . might be right . . . might be wrong . . . I don't know . . . (then smilingly) suppose we do right things from old time law then we can't go wrong.'

Wondering just how long it took us people to understand that many of the things these primitive people do have arisen from keen observation over the ages, I only nodded in reply as the native cook at the shooting-camp called out that a drink of tea was on. So I went that way to eat with the white boss, whilst Ringas had his smoko of tea and brownie with the shooting-horses and the chattering women who washed and salted the hides on the traditional sun-dreaming of the magic-stone place.

## DIFFERENT SONG

Every church go 'nother way,  
Some sing different song;  
Christian people read in book,  
They right and others wrong;  
Must-be God can't understand  
Which one they belong.

Sunday comes and white-boss goes,  
To church 'cause him boss there;  
Missus goes in pretty clothes  
Nice one hat she'll wear;  
And bosses' kids they no like church,  
Dress up make them swear.

'Some men work,' my old man say,  
'Hard work for few bob;  
Policeman catch the loafer-man  
When him kick and rob;  
Pub-man, God-man, working-man  
All must do their job.'

My old man him say to me,  
'Mission-man they lie,  
Talk-talk no more trouble-kind  
When live up in the sky;  
But if that place is good, then why,  
They no like to die?'

## MITJARRA'S TRICK

**M**ITJARRA SAT beneath a shady river-gum tree beside my camp and had the little aboriginal children in fits of laughter as he made imprints of the animals and birds on the red soft sand, and told them, as he did so, the simple myths that went with the track of each creature.

Now he bunches his fingers together and moves like a cat as it pads over the ground, then he bends the index and middle finger of his right hand and the track of a goat goes bleating on its way. Now he punches his clenched fist on to the earth, then puts small toes on a baby's foot and, instantly rubbing it out, he links his little fingers together to bend the hands outward so that the thumbs on the ground make the footprints of a wallaby as it goes hopping on its way.

Watching him at his visual stories and the eagerness of the youngsters to read the signs, I thought of a story a white bushman told me of how he was travelling with camels in unknown country when the wife of one of his aboriginal camelmen called out in amazement as they crossed over some aborigines' tracks that were leading to the same rock-hole they were heading for.

Her cause for surprise was the bare footprint of her sister in the sand among the others. She had not seen the girl since she left that part over twelve years ago, yet here on the soft sand she could distinguish her footprints after all those years.

'She was little fellow girl when I leave this country, now she has grown up into woman,' she told my friend. 'Poor fellow my sister.'

To the aboriginal woman there was no mistaking the tell-tale mark of her sister. As a child she had often seen and followed her trail and, just as we recognize a person by their features, so could she, and any other native, tell the name of the person in their tribe by their track on the ground. And here was Mitjarra giving the children their schooling in this form of observation.

I knew Mitjarra to be a great tracker who had first learnt his art with his elders in the bush, then on the cattle stations where the tracking of cattle and horses was essential to mustering the herd, and finally he was employed by the police as a black-tracker to assist them in their work. Without his training in bushcraft and his

knowledge of the bush, the law would have been severely handicapped with the carrying out of its duties.

So I watched him as he brushed over the sand to make other tracks, and when he had finished and the children departed to their camps I asked him about this art of tracking and the many feats he had performed.

For some time he studied the ground before him and in that pause I could read how he was wondering just how interested I was in his art. Was I just one of those strange whites who just 'listen nothing', or was I really interested in the tale? Suddenly his mind was made up and he began.

'With tracking, old man, we must know the tracks of things and how old they are . . . our eyes are open all the time and this one,' here he pointed to his head, 'is where we find plenty things that lead to places that have no trails.'

Saying this he told me this strange story, which I have re-written.

Old Crumps, the pensioner who was reported to be rich with tins full of money hid around his camp, had been beaten up and robbed by someone in the old bush town, and now on the scene was old Sergeant of police Gadger, Trooper Bloogs and black-tracker Mitjarra.

Heavy rain on the night of the assault and robbery had obliterated all tracks and all old Gadger could do was grumble and swear as he gazed at the wrecked place which had been nearly pulled apart by the thief as he searched for the money. Fingerprints in those places had never been heard of, and all Gadger could do was warn Mitjarra, when he saw him pick up an old alarm clock and test the winder, not to touch anything.

'Yer dam tracking is no good here,' he told his tracker. 'Hell of a job finding anything here this morning and useless to look for tracks after the heavy rain.'

He paused as he spotted Mitjarra picking up the butt-end of a cigarette off the ground, and watching the tracker carefully unroll the paper to put the half-smoked tobacco in a tin he carried, and muttering something about 'Dam scavengers', he was just about to give an order that they go elsewhere when Mitjarra held up his hand, as a sign that he was on the trail, and out he went into the morning air and on to the rain-sodden earth.

Mitjarra walked as in a trance, and, as one who follows a sleep-walker, Gadger and Bloogs followed behind.

Over the hard stony road the trio went. Through pools of rain water they trudged, and as they went Gadger tried hard to puzzle out just what was in his tracker's mind, and the newly arrived Bloogs,

fresh from the city and crammed full of aboriginal magic and telepathy with a dash of bone-pointing tossed in, was becoming excited as he tried hard to unravel the mysteries around him.

Voicing his opinions to his hard-headed superior who had followed Mitjarra over many hard trails, he only received a guttural remark about 'Blacks and animals being the same', so he just fell into line and followed in the rear.

Down the main street they went to enter a side-lane at the rear of the local hotel. At that place Mitjarra wandered around a little before suddenly making up his mind. Then out they went by another back alley to be watched by the eagle-eye of Daggers the publican, whose brains worked overtime, like a tin of worms, trying to fathom what it was all about.

And watching the worrying publican as they went their way, Mitjarra smiled to himself as they crossed the sandy bed of the town river that had been washed clean and level by the spate of water that had come down it over-night.

On Mitjarra went, with his superiors following till they came to a low stony hill with a dense patch of green acacia-trees beyond, and there the black-tracker bade the others wait till he went to the crest of the hill and spied out the land.

By this time Gadger knew the tracker was on the right trail and Mitjarra was up to one of his mysterious tricks. He said nothing, for to him the prisoner was the prize he wanted and the rest was as nothing, so he bade the impatient Bloogs stay with him and wait for the tracker's sign.

As Mitjarra peered over the hill, he could see a thin wisp of smoke rise beside a tent among the bushes and carefully he watched its owner as he sat beside the camp-fire. The man, who went under the name of Scraggs, seemed restless as he sat there, and Mitjarra smiled to himself as he noticed the signs which reminded him of a dog who had hidden a bone in the bush and fears that something may see the marks of the burial and take it away. Watching carefully he finally saw the man looking in the direction of a ledge of rocks on the hillside, and with that sign the tracker returned to Gadger and Bloogs and, stealthily as a native cat, they moved near the ledge and awaited Scraggs' arrival.

Not long did they wait before they heard some scratching on the ledge, and at that sign the Sergeant gave them the signal to move in upon the culprit.

The surprise was complete. Scraggs was arrested digging out Crumps' money. 'Him the robber-one all right,' remarked Mitjarra. 'Him too-much think about that money in tins and want to shift it to better place. Talk about jump with fright and swear

when that old man Gadger been put handcuff longa him arm . . . he can't make it out, we just too quick for him.'

'What about policeman,' I questioned. 'Might-be they can't make it out too?'

Mitjarra slowly shook his head. 'Plenty policeman all day like that old man Gadger. Blackfellow find prisoner . . . they put him longa jail . . . nobody talk only newspaper from south write about clever fellow whiteman and blackfellow just rubbish.' Mitjarra smiled reminiscently then continued, 'Like when I was on cattle station and follow track of horse or cattle . . . when hard ground then black man in the lead, but when soft one ground then white man take lead and talk-talk big fellow mouth . . . all-time like that, blackfellow lose and whitefellow win all the time.'

The tale finished, the old tracker went on making footprints in the soft sand. I could tell he was awaiting my final question, so I asked him just how he knew the robber was Scraggs.

'Well,' he answered as he brushed the earth clean with his hard wrinkled hand, 'the government at that time only gave us trackers stick tobacco that was sometime rubbish one . . . so we all-time pick up cigarette butt when we see it in town. Plenty time we wait about as man smoke so that we get end piece as he throw it away.'

'Now when that two fellow policemen and I been go to that place where that poor old man got hurt and robbed for money I knew that we can't find out from track so I just look about hard fellow way. I look-look that clock and see that it had stopped . . . now that old man Crumps was good friend to me and when I sit down at his place night-time I see that he always wind up that clock before pub shut, so I think-think meself, Ah! that robber-man do this thing early night time. Then I look-look floor and see long cigarette on floor and I picked it up for plenty tobacco. Good job I pick it up,' he continued, 'for when I unroll it to take out tobacco I know that the robber one is Scraggs. This cigarette I find here on floor has the end turned back just like Scraggs does it in and around pub. No other man in this country do it that way . . . I savae this for I know the way every man roll up his cigarette in this town . . . too many times I have picked them up to get tobacco and I knew that Crumps and Scraggs were bad friend over black woman business, so must be that cigarette been fall down when they fight in dark place. That easy ain't it?'

'Only easy because you got rubbish one tobacco,' I replied, 'but why all this gammon tracking business to Scraggs' camp?'

Mitjarra laughed aloud as at a great joke. 'I been do that to make that new fellow policeman think blackfellow different kind . . . whitefellow all day like that, they think that we fellow do things like

devil-devil way. Think we read smoke signal like whitefellow writing . . . must be they mad. That smoke tell us people that blackfellow come up; just like smoke from train tell white people at railway station that train come up . . .'

'Like bone-pointing business?' I queried.

'All-a-same,' he replied, 'when blackfellow get sick they think someone sing them for die . . . straight away newspaper talk "Bone pointing business", and everybody read paper.'

'We call that mystery,' I told Mitjarra.

'We call it trick,' replied the old tracker as he went on making the footprints of creatures on the soft red earth.

## Chapter 24

### THEY ALWAYS GET THEIR MAN

As I FINISHED reading the magazine story about a Northern Territory trooper's famous exploit in hunting down an aboriginal, my old aboriginal mate Mokarm shook his head from side to side as he remarked, 'All the time like that old man. White people proper clever one and black people, who do everything are just nothing.'

'Just nothing.' I laid the magazine aside and thought back over many years to that incident referred to by the magazine. Of how things that are nothing then, become distorted with age. . . .

It all began with the usual white man's interference in tribal matters. It concerned a pretty aboriginal girl called Allarri and a mother and father who had become divorced from their old way of life and now, under the protection of the big cattle-station boss, held her as an article of trade to curry favour with all.

Into the scene came the native stockman who was 'wrong-side'. Against tribal law he claimed Allarri as his wife. With the cattle-station manager on his side he defied Allarri's rightful husband Wulgran, who was a true tribesman. Out of the struggle betwixt the old and the new way of life came death by spear to the defiant lover and Wulgran on the run with the white trooper on his trail.

'I was a black-tracker then,' said Mokarm. 'With that trooper I followed Wulgran's tracks from murder place . . . he was sleeping quietly beside his camp-fire when we put chains on him, and as we led him away he can't understand why we treated him this way, telling me, in his language which I understood, that he was right by blackfellow law, and as he said it I was proper sorry for that prisoner who did not understand the ways of the white people.'

'It was a long way to the river town and the jail-house,' continued the old ex-tracker. 'That trooper had picked up three other prisoners for cattle killing, and they and Wulgran had chains on their necks to keep them from running away.'

'I rode on horse in the lead with the prisoners coming behind in

the middle and the trooper with rifle behind them,' explained Mokarm, 'and riding that way we came to the cattle-station bullock-paddock fence, and as I dismounted to open the gate that Wulgran somehow picked up a stick with his toes, and as that trooper looked to where another prisoner was pointing, he jabbed the sharp point hard into the belly of the trooper's horse so that it bucked into the air and the trooper with his rifle fell hard upon the ground. When that thing happened the prisoners raced off into the bush and as I raced to catch the trooper's horse that galloped away, I could see Wulgran and his mob racing through the bushes towards the hill country nearby.

'We tried to follow, but lost them in the hard stone country that was full of steep gullies down which we could not ride, so we returned to the river town for more tucker and fresh horses, and all the way in that trooper blame me for not racing after the prisoners after he had lost them. . . . No good me telling him that it was his fault, for not keeping eyes open, for white people always get angry when us black people tell them they are wrong.

'When we get into the town and the Sergeant hear the news, he got proper angry with that trooper and made us two fellow go back straight away into the bush after the prisoners, so we pack up more horses and away we go.

'We met some blackfellows as we travelled back to the cattle station,' Mokarm continued, 'and they handed over to the trooper the neck-chains of the prisoners, saying they had found them on a stony hill out from the bullock-paddock gate and it was easy to see that the locks had been opened by the use of stone-hammers.

'Black people are all-a-same kangaroos in the bush,' my narrator continued, 'when out hunting they go anywhere and everywhere looking for tucker, but when you see the track going one way you can tell from that track where they are going and what they are thinking about. So I get that trooper to ride out wide from that place where the chains were found, and as we do I cut that Wulgran's tracks, and following them, I can see he is making for a big rock-hole in the hills. We ride fast to that place and at dawn we can see a smoke coming from a cave near the top.

'As I see that smoke,' continued Mokarm, 'I tell that trooper that it might be another trick that Wulgran is playing on us, but that white man is too angry to listen and talk-talks about getting even and going alone after his man.

Mokarm shook his head and laughed aloud as he remembered that scene of bygone days. 'Proper fool that trooper . . . he gammon

to sneak up easy-way but he was too new for his job . . . he got silly-one white helmet on his head and just as he got near that cave-place I saw Wulgran come out on big rock above him, and Bang! that trooper get big smack on the helmet with stick and down he went.

'I shouted out and started climbing the hill to help my boss, and when I get there he is swearing properly way and growling at me because Wulgran has run off with his helmet and rifle . . . I been want to laugh at the fool but me too-fright, so I laugh inside myself.

'Two days later,' went on Mokarm, 'we rode into the cattle-station to find that manager proper angry with everybody because that Wulgran has taken away Allarri and with her had gone a pair of the boss's riding boots . . . talk about trouble . . . everybody can't make it out why he stole the boots till some walkabout natives came in and said they had seen Wulgran naked in bush . . . he got no clothes on body . . . only boss's boots on his feet and trooper's helmet on head. He had Allarri with him and rifle in his hand but nothing bullet, for that rifle, for he threw them all away as just rubbish.

'When boss of cattle-station and trooper hear that, they get proper mad and all the white traveller-men on the river they laugh no-more-little-bit and very happy because they did not like that cattle boss who was too-much greedy for young black girl, and that trooper who all time think he was too-clever.

'Next day that trooper borrow rifle from cattle boss and away we go once more and we cut that Wulgran's track on some soft ground in a valley and when I show that boot-track to that trooper he straight away ride in the lead, but when he lose tracks on hard ground he fall behind and I go in lead for that was my work . . . that Wulgran always kept on soft ground . . . sometimes he and Allarri would walk bare-footed and carry boots and then they would sit down and Wulgran would put them on again. I told the trooper that something funny going on, but he only laughed and said something about blackfellows being children when they get new toy.

'We followed them tracks for a long way, then at a big water-hole near some hard ground, we rode wide, and when I cut the track only the boot track was there, but it was still going on.

'I told the trooper that it might be another trick of Wulgran's but he only laughed and said that must be that Allarri got tired and run away back to the cattle station and good tucker.'

Mokarm shook his head from side to side and muttered, 'White people might know white people but we black people do know our

countrymen, so I just say nothing and we ride on and on following the boot tracks.'

'Three days we followed those boot tracks over hard ground and then, on some soft ground we saw the trooper's rifle standing up like a post and beside it was the two boots in line . . . no tracks ahead . . . nothing . . . just as though a great Kunmurri devil had swooped down in the night and carried Wulgran away.

'That trooper just sit on his horse swearing and scratching his head . . . and me . . . well I think it devil-devil business . . . I can't make it out too. . . .'

Mokarm paused, and from the twinkle in his eyes I knew he had the clue to the story, so I asked him to explain, and he continued:

'A long time afterwards I was told that Wulgran had stolen the cattle boss's boots to give us a trick. At first he wore them for his tribespeople to see . . . his showing us his footprints beside Allarri's was to trick us that they were together and he was wearing them . . . at the hard ground near the first water-hole he gave Allarri the boots to wear, and told her to return to her tribespeople on the islands and what to do to get there.

'Where the hard ground hit the soft earth they parted,' explained Mokarm. 'He to cover his tracks as he went and dived into the water-hole and so return to the hills; she to go on with the boots and so lead us astray.

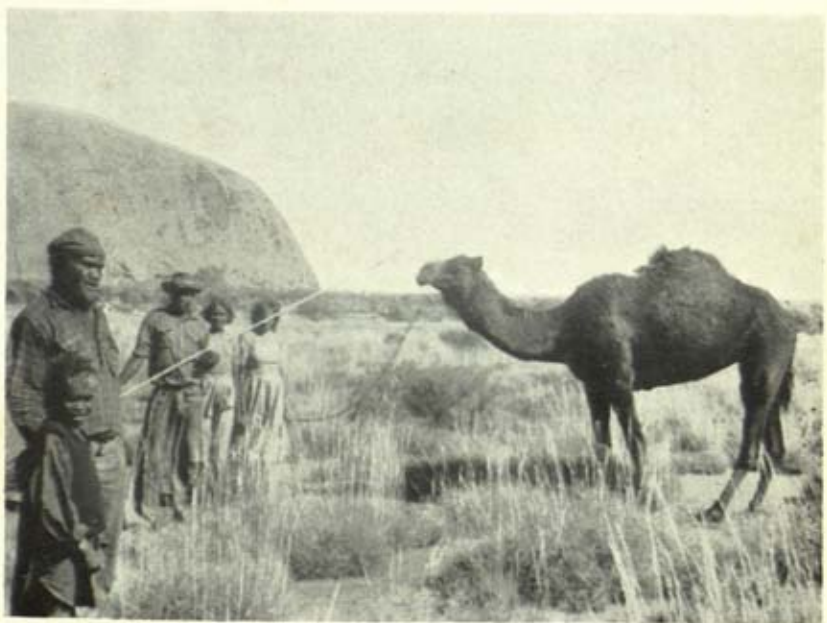
'Allarri went on till she came to a salt-water river where the island natives had a canoe tied up to carry them across and out from that place she gave us the "trick" by standing up the rifle, and stepping out of the boots, she walked backwards barefooted along the boot-prints, and as she did she remade a new set of boot-tracks with an old pair of the boss's boots that had been cast away and carried by Wulgran to use in this way . . . then when Allarri got to some hard ground she bound her feet with a couple of dresses she carried and, walking, as a Kurditja-man of the Centre would do when on a murder trail, she walked over to the river, dived in and swam to the canoe. This she paddled away to the island and her friends who protected her.'

'What happened to Wulgran?' I asked, and Mokarm replied, 'Well we can't do nothing after we were fooled with that boot trick, so we go back to the police station and, after big trouble, that trooper go away to head office and a new man come out on next boat to take his place. . . . By that time wet weather start so we wait for next year to go out on patrol.'

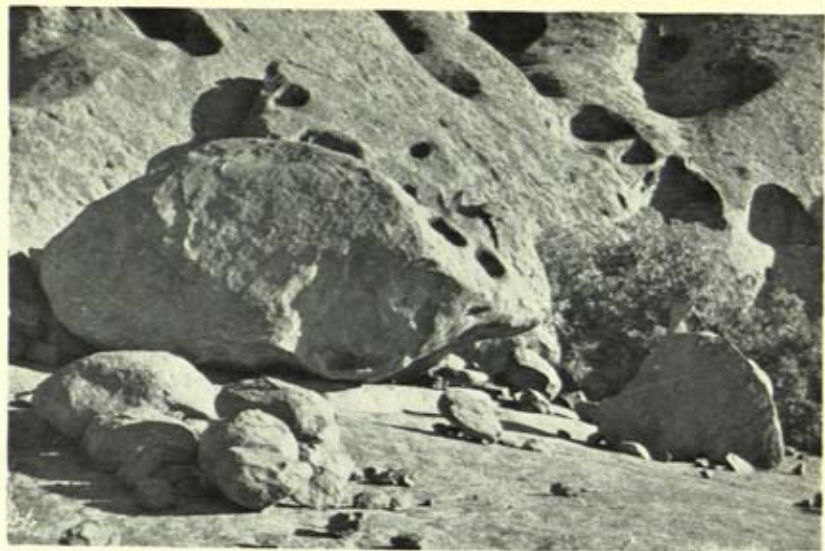
Mokarm smiled at this part of the story and looking at me, he remarked, 'You know how we caught Wulgran old man . . . you



Ancient rituals, which express patterns of living as old as time, control the conduct of the tribe. (See "Rainbow Business")



Old Uluru the Uluritdja with his family and camel came on visit to Ayers Rock. (See Epilogue, "The Symbols of Uluru")



The Kurungara stone was the central ritual feature of the Mother-place  
(See Epilogue, "The Symbols of Uluru")



The mulga trees shaded my camp at Ayers Rock. (See Epilogue, "The Symbols of Uluru")

was there when we brought him in . . . more better you read that story old man . . . proper funny one.'

The writer of the article had told how the relentless limb of the law had got his man. His was a tale of living off the bush and walking hundreds of miles over rugged mountains until, in despair, the culprit was cornered and brought to justice.

Mokarm and I laughed as I re-read the tale of how the law got its man.

I was camped, forty years ago, at the mouth of a river gorge when the clatter of hobble chains against tied-up horse bells warned me a horse plant was coming my way.

As they came in I was greeted by the new trooper of Mokarm's tale and beside him was my old native story-teller. The new trooper was a man of the bush who had been born and grew up amidst the tribespeople of the Northern Territory and as he boiled his billy-can for dinner the owner of a run-down grazing licence came down from his bark-hut to join in the conversation, and the subject was aborigines.

'I wonder where Wulgran is?' remarked the trooper, and we were all amazed when the cattle man replied. 'He is here working for me. I've got him making a log-fence between the hills,' then said pointedly, so as to find favour with the trooper, 'I'm sending out natives with rations tomorrow.'

Next day the old procedure was enacted. The tracker Mokarm stripped off his clothes and with the mud-daubed body of a hunter he went out with the ration-natives. At the appointed time and place where Wulgran was to receive his pay of rations he was soon overpowered and once more the chains were upon him.

Whilst this was going on the trooper and I rested under a shady leichhardt-tree beside a cool swimming pool. Resting there the man of the law explained how futile it would have been for him to go out after his man.

'Black trackers are the best people for the job,' he explained. 'In the bush they are hard to detect. If I went out after Wulgran he would have seen me for miles. To get our man we must use the right men for the job. The only bloke I'm crooked on is this old whitefellow here, who informed on a real good tribesman who was in the right from the beginning.'

So Wulgran came in heavy with chains and the courts of the river town sent him away to Darwin. Years afterwards I saw him on the Alligator River, where he was working as a buffalo shooter.

His tribe had been broken up by contact. The old order had

departed. The black-trackers of that time—men such as Mokarm—are now living out their lives around the government settlements, and little remains of the past except some retired trooper, now called policeman, who remembers, and smiles, as he reads the stories of how ‘they always got their man’.

RAINBOW BUSINESS

A BIG CORROBOREE was on down the flat beside some bough sheds, well away from the main camp where the aboriginal women and children laughed and worked on their daily chores of making grass dilly-bags and re-cooking some of the meat from yesterday's hunt; a procedure that was used by both the blacks and whites in those days before refrigeration.

Each night, over the past week, I had heard the big murakungongs of the native ritual 'Yabudruwa' donging through the still air as they welcomed in some new arrivals to this great ceremony, and interested in the show, I strolled up one morning to see what was going on at the main ritual ground.

The usual smouldering camp-fires were around, and beside them sat old natives scratching around in the ashes and casting an anxious eye towards the distant women's camp as they awaited the signal that some food was ready for them.

None worried about my presence because I was just another whitefellow who came to 'look-look nothing' and not as one who came to share in the spiritual revitalization of this ritual.

My old friend Wilrandju was busy dabbing tufts of ochred kapok over his body as I came into that place set aside as a primitive dressing-room by the dancers. Giving me a nod of recognition, he waved me to sit down on a hunk of red ant-bed nearby, and went on scrutinizing his facial patterns in a piece of mirror. Satisfied with the results, he began to chant some ancient song relating to this dance. As he did so I looked around upon that strange scene.

Here and there, beneath some of the shady trees, other natives were busy drawing blood from the median vein of their arm; it was used by the tribesmen to enable them to fix the totemic patterns on to their bodies, and as each went about their work they chanted, in low voices, other totemic songs of the 'Yabudruwa'.

Some time before, the aboriginal messengers had painted on their chests the symbol of this ritual, and, travelling round the country, they had given everyone the sign, and now the Ngulpun tribespeople were coming in to this place beside my camp. A large water-hole connected with the ritual's origin.

'Man just like bird,' jocularly said Wilrandju as he pointed

towards a distant smoke that indicated that some tribespeople were coming in from the east. 'Blackfellow just walk and hunt all time till they see flower come on tree or bird call, and straightaway they think about blackfellow business and must come to these places for big corroboree and plenty talk-talk.'

'That all right one time,' I replied, 'when everybody lived in bush, but what about blackfellow that work on cattle stations and live in towns?'

'Some fellows think themselves clever and forget . . . when they do that they are not like we . . .'

His last sentence somehow refreshed his memory about an incident from the past, and as he fixed the ochred kapok on to his naked body with blood he told his story.

'One time I worked in a town as a black-tracker for policeman that the black people called Chicken-hawk because he pounced on them from nowhere when they do wrong, just like that bird do, so they give him that name.'

'Well, in that town,' he continued, 'there was plenty blackfellow working, and all time they drink grog that white people sell . . . proper terrible place and too many of my countrymen die there because they been lose their country.'

'That Chicken-hawk, he got two black-tracker, me and another one called Billy who came from different tribe. That Billy, him too much like girl, and when they go on bush patrol he sometime make trouble with old man who got young wife, and this way he get that Chicken-hawk to bring in that girl . . . law business first time, then sweetheart behind; from that business he now had an old brother of his called Djinba who got pretty-one wife called Ruby, and two-fellow Billy and Ruby proper sweetheart 'gether.

'Plenty time when that Billy get old Djinba drunk and him and Ruby playabout 'gether, I sing blackfellow songs that say how big trouble will come from that trick business, but that Billy only laugh loud fellow and say that, "Blackfellow business rubbish one, and whitefellow way right".'

Wilrandju paused in his tale as he lay down on his back to allow another ritual elder to put on patterns he could not reach, and when the primitive make-up artist had finished he continued with his tale.

'That Djinba was proper brother for Billy so he don't mind his wife and that black-tracker playing about, for that is tribal business, and everybody happy till red flowers come on the coral tree, and when that old Djinba see that sign he straight away get ready to take his people back to his country to do all-a-same as we people do at this place . . . flower give sign, blackfellow follow law.

'Billy tried hard to stop that one Djinba from going, but he can't do it, and all time he talk-talk that suppose he don't go then the Rainbow snake will kill him next rain-time. He try to get Ruby to run away with him but that young woman too sorry for that old man who had fed her and her mother, tribal-way, and she say "No". That rubbish-one Billy just could not understand that proper black-fellow always follow right law.

'When that Ruby talk like that, that Billy get sulky no-more-little-bit, and then big trouble come up when blackfellow find that poor old Djinba, naked and dead fellow in water-hole. When I hear that news I go straight away to Billy's camp near police station and there I tell Billy and Ruby that terrible news.

'Ruby was sorry properly way and cut her head with knife, but that Billy do nothing, so when Chicken-hawk, Billy and I go down to body-place, I think to myself, "Something wrong with this Billy who no more sorry-sorry".

'When we get to body I see Billy's track on ground and straight away I ask him What name as I point to track, and that Chicken-hawk listen hard-fellow way as he make answer. "This dead one Djinba and me been sit down naked one beside this fire. He came to my camp from town. He was drunken-one and I been growl at him . . . he talk-talk about country and Rainbow business and then he get very angry and run away into bush . . . I try follow, but lose him on rock ground that make no track. Now him dead, poor fellow. Must be him fall in water dead-drunk and drown."

'Now when that Billy talk-talk Rainbow business my ear-hole jump-jump. I looked at his clean shirt, but at open neck I see something that tell me that that Billy was telling lies. "You no more touch that dead one last night?" and straight away that Billy answer, "Nothing". When he say that I know that Billy been murder that old man to get Ruby.'

'How?' I questioned, and Wilrandju answered, 'Listen!', so I awaited the climax.

'Now that Chicken-hawk know that I have some news, so he told Billy to mind body as we gammon look-about, and then I tell him story.

'Blackfellow law is right, and in the tribe when people see sign that tell all to muster for corroboree, then all-about must go to that place of plenty tucker, and as everybody eat-up-big and get happy for tribal business, they rub their bodies with red ochre to keep out the magic poisons that are thrown out by the Rainbow snakes that watch from the sky to kill the ones who do not believe.

'Well,' explained Wilrandju, 'that Djinba done things right way. He rubbed his body with red ochre . . . when I tell Chicken-hawk

that, he go back, and when that Billy take off his shirt, that he put on after killing, we could see the red stains on his arms and shoulders made as he carried the drunken man to the water to push his head under till he died. Nobody talk as that Billy look at his body, silly fellow way. That policeman just tell him what he did and that black-tracker him say proper sorry-way, "I been proper fool . . . old man right. . . . Rainbow kill people who no more listen . . . me proper murderer."

'You see,' explained Wilrandju, 'that Djinba followed the law and rubbed his body with red ochre. In night time that Billy see no red ochre as he carry that poor old man.'

'Djinba died, but he followed the law, Why?' I quizzed the old man.

'Djinba died from murder,' quickly responded Wilrandju, 'but that Billy got trapped from Rainbow business . . . Rainbow best tracker . . . can't lose.'

'Where Billy now?' I asked the old man.

'First time he went to jail,' he answered, 'and when he was in there he met another old man from his country who had been put into jail for killing whitefellow over woman's business . . . that old man was big boss for this Yabudruwa and while two-fellow all day crack stones with hammer in jail yard, he teach Billy every song and Billy learn proper way 'cause he not think about girl.'

As he spoke an old native came up to sit beside us and from the old fellow's laughter and conversation I sensed that he was the black-tracker of the murder. He nodded as I gave him greeting and began beating two tap-sticks together as he told to all the tribesmen the ancient stories of their people. And as he chanted in a low voice, the decorated tribesmen came out of their camp-fires and moved towards the ritual place of this great ceremony.

## SOME SAYINGS OF ABORIGINAL PHILOSOPHY

*On death.* 'Death just like nothing.'

*On restraint in sex.* 'If want . . . can't help . . . must have.'

*On adultery.* 'Man steal wife . . . bring her back . . . why growl . . . still there.'

*On senile decay.* 'Like dry tree . . . dead but still standing.'

*On hunger.* 'If worry . . . more hungry.'

*On retiring.* 'When old . . . must find shady tree.'

*The braggart.* 'They who hunt with mouth are always hungry.'

*On charity.* 'People only give away what they don't want.'

*On kindness.* 'When soft-belly plenty times hungry.'

*On justness.* 'If in wrong then can't growl when trouble comes.'

*On ritual faith.* 'By faith we live, by force we perish.'

*Trouble makers.* 'If make trouble then get big trouble.'

*On the correct way of life.* 'They who lose dreaming (purpose in life) are lost.'

*A two-faced person is.* 'Mouth one way . . . belly 'nother way.'

*On knowledge of country.* 'Can't hunt in tribal land till country knows you.'

## *Epilogue*

### THE SYMBOLS OF ULURU

OLD KADAKADEKA of the Uluritdja tribe and I stood beside Ayers Rock, the Uluru of the tribespeople. Our nearest town was Alice Springs in Central Australia which was two hundred and seventy miles away to the north-east. We had both come from Alice Springs to Ayers Rock—I as the Ranger of the Reserve, and he to explain to me the places of his youth which he had left over fifty years before.

And now we both stood on the western face of this solitary stone which rises over eleven hundred feet above the forest timbers that surrounded us, and is five and a half miles around its base.

Everywhere in that morning air was a riot of reflected light from the pink cliffs that towered above to the trees where one could see every shade of green. The acacia with its drooping branches and dark-green leaves is called the 'desert willow' by those who have poetry in their hearts, but it is known as 'ironwood' to the bushmen because of its tough hard wood. Overhead swayed the light green eucalyptus called 'bloodwoods' because the gum that flows from them is red, and under the cliff face is the blue-green of the sandalwood tree—the Aranguli plums of the tribespeople and the blue-plums of the white bushmen.

Around our feet, as we trod our way, was the fragrant lemon-scented kangaroo grass and wild geraniums that wave their yellow blooms as we go by.

Old Kadakadeka was chanting one of the tribal songs that he learnt when, as a youth, he was passed through the great initiation ritual connected with this mountain. According to tribal lore Uluru was created by the Earth-Mother and her Heroes in the dawn of time. Now they all are asleep in the mountain, to be revitalized at each ritual time of their people. Both the creators and the people are watched over by the sacred Wanambi serpent that has its home in the rock-hole of Uluru. This hole lies in a wooded valley two hundred feet above the mountain's base near Mutidjula (knee-knife) the Maggie Springs of our maps.

For days and weeks we wandered around the mountain, coming home each night and then returning in the morning to continue our

quest. We had but two miles of the mountain to examine but we took our time. I must not question the Aboriginal song-man as he looked for the symbols that would revive his memory of days gone by. Now and then I heard a low chant, a part of the great myth that had been handed on to him by his tribal protector, or God-father. Slowly enlightenment came to the old man. Loud and still louder he chanted until the cliff faces gave back the echoes of his song. I hurriedly wrote down the chants as he sang them. And now, out of his translations, I give this story of the symbolism of Uluru.

'Tis dark with the blackness of night. Everywhere is silence, till a voice, as a bullroarer, calls for life to be created. As it does, the totemic forms of the Mala-waddi or Kangaroo-rat men, rise up to form the tail and back of the huge creature. Today we see this symbol as the Webo or tail of Uluru (the place which is known to us whites as the Climb).'

Kadakadeka's chant now goes on to the smoke-blackened kulpie (shelter) where, to the east of the Webo, the creative heroes slept their first sleep, and around that place he chanted over the large boulders that represent the men of the creation period.

Now comes the dawn-chant as light comes in upon the earth to reveal the ritual Malawaddi crouching at that place which we whites call the Sound-shell, and chanting, the old man explained that the outer lip of that wave-like shelter was the cheats of the ritual Kangaroo-rat men as they awaited the ritual chant of the creative song-man.

Now out of the darkness comes a voice. The voice of the Earth-Mother, and as she strikes the earth with her sacred *Wana* (digging-stick of fertility), the light breaks through the darkness, and as it does, the Malawaddi sway to the rhythm of the sacred chants and life has begun on the earth. Loudly chants Kadakadeka, and in his translation I hear the story of reincarnation as the *djindalagul* or 'Sun-over' side of Ayers Rock reveal the symbols of her life-giving chants.

The old tribesman points out to me the pelvic-shaped kulpie of the putta, with small holes before it that represent the cooking fires of the first dawn feast, and there, at that 'pouch of the marsupial or place of the pubic hair' the creative-men, and Kadakadeka afterwards, chant the story of reincarnation. As he chants, my old friend mimes the tale of how the spirit-shades of all the Uluritdja await within the mountain. Wait to be reborn as spirit-children within the ceremonial chants of the living tribesmen.

'Over there they sing songs for children,' explained my old friend as he pointed to the *putta*, 'but here' (we hurried to a rock shelter

about one hundred yards to the eastward). 'Here is the kulpic with the painting of the Mother and her first initiate.'

I looked to where he pointed and saw a crude painting, shaped like a bull-roarer with another one to its right. The latter showed a youth preparing to enter the ritual; the former symbolized the Mother. Both paintings are about three feet long. The Mother one carries the sign of the Kumbunduru in its centre. That dark mark made down the mountain side by running water is the tribesmen's symbol of happiness. Around the Kumbunduru is the dark-red which denotes ritual, and along the border, with white lines radiating outwards, is the symbol of invisibility and after-life. Everything is in the abstract to the uninitiated, but to they who understand it is full of meaning. The central core of the Mother is happiness, then ritual to be followed by rebirth.

Kadakadeka explained that the songs of reincarnation ceased at the Mother paintings and the ritual chants of regeneration began for the youths, who, under guardianship since their circumcision, were now led in by their tribal protectors in order that they chant the tribal code before the elders of the Mother-place.

And now, in my song-man's chants, the Earth-Mother is beside the mountain and the Creative Heroes within it are listening. We are standing about two hundred yards eastward of the Mother paintings at a place called the *kundju*, or main camp of the ritual. My friend directs my attention to a crack on the cliff face that symbolizes the raising of the first sacred *ngaltawaddi* (Wana digging-stick of the Mother) that now rests at the place which we unknowing white people call the 'Kangaroo-tail'.

It was here in this *kundju* that the initiates were first shown the sacred symbol of the Mother, and there, as 'ones who were inside', they chanted, before stern elders, obedience to the tribal laws in this ancient form of catechism.

'I stood here,' Kadakadeka told me, 'I and other lads who were said to be inside the Earth Mother's womb. As 'insides' we wore our headdress of feathers, and, chanting songs, we looked for the first time upon the sacred ritual pole. I was frightened . . . frightened till my guardian told me to look up and not be afraid, so I looked and chanted the laws of the tribe as I was bidden.'

'From here,' explained my old friend, 'we went to the sacred and secret place of Woreaki. It was there that the 'insides' were told to cut the median vein of their arm, and there, in that place forbidden to women, they chanted as the blood ran from their bodies on to the traditional stains of their ancestors.'

A few yards to the east of Woreaki my Uluritdja song-man showed me the main symbol of the Kumbunduru. It was but an

oblong black stain on the rock face outlined with a white stained border. A simple thing but two feet long, yet here the tribesmen performed their primal dance and chant when they knew the food was in abundance and water was plentiful around. And chanting, the messengers painted that sign on their chests before they went out to bring in the tribesmen to this great ritual of the Mother.

From the symbol of the Kumbunduru, we wended our way between large boulders, many of which were painted, to stand finally beside a great slab of stone, the symbol of the *ngaltawaddi*, in its profane resting place. Beside it Kadakadeka's chant spoke of the lifting up of that symbol, and as he did he pointed out to me the large boulders around the base of it that symbolized the ritual men who lifted it alongside the mountain.

I asked him why they put it there, and his reply that the camp of the women was a short distance further round the mountain, explained that here was another phase of the ritual.

On our right, as we faced the great slab of stone, were two ravines down the mountain. These were the cult-paths of men belonging to the black-goanna totem. Out of the chants, Kadakadeka explained how they were the first to make rain, and the marks on the mountain face are the trails of the storm water they made.

'The storm-water, like the Ningeri, digs a path down the mountain's side.' So chanted Kadakadeka and I wrote it down.

Around the mountain we wandered to the large cave which is called the 'Camp of the Women' and the large boulders before it are said to be the women awaiting with their bodies exposed.

We hurry past that place, for somehow my friend did not wish to discuss what he calls 'Woman's business', and now on the eastern side of Uluru the old man pointed out to me the crowded symbols of his cult. He took me to the Nangaru or 'Mother-place' and standing beside the rock-hole of Nginindi that symbolizes the womb of the Mother, he chanted and pointed out to me the sacred places around. Above my head he pointed out that strange weathering of the cliff face that is known to us white people as the 'Brain' and looking up at it he chanted the *Ngora* song of the 'Elder's camp' and explained how their totem spirit still lives within it.

Now he looks to the right and chants the *Pindju* or Nest-song. His chant tells how the initiates called Koodindbas (eaglets) are so called because they are covered with the down of that bird affixed to their bodies with human blood. Forlorn they must lay in the nest and await the coming of the ritual-dog Kapanya, who is sent eastward from his conception-burial place at Palpealla to drag them down into the womb of the Mother-place.

My old friend's ritual chants grew louder and told how the red-

backed kingfisher bird, Loondba, who dwelt high on the mountain face, gave the warning cry to all that she had heard the ritual dog coming beneath the earth like a giant mole. Fearing for the safety of the sacred women she leapt down to the camp where they were busy on their stone djewas grinding some wanganu grass-seeds into a flour that would be made into a dough with their breast-milk. When cooked on the fire before the sacred Mother-stone it would become the karungara-bread, which symbolizes the Earth-mother's body at the final feast of this great ritual.

Kadakadeka pointed out to me the bell-shaped stone to the west of the Mother-place and told me it was the Loondba calling, but her warning came too late. The ritual-dog leapt as she called and there on the mountain side I was shown the footprints of the creature as he went after the initiates in the Pindju overhead.

Now Kadakadeka stood before the Mother-stone. He chanted the song of the 'Djindra-djindra' which records how a woman of the Willy-wagtail totem was speared by a left-handed man of the Mala-waddi because she defied the sacred taboo laws and looked out from a rock-hole above the ritual ground during the creative ceremonies. As he chanted he pointed out to me an elongated stone to the right of the Nginiindi rock-hole, and, explaining that this was her body, he pointed to a small hole in the stone that was made by the spear of the killer.

Again his chant changed its note, and I observed that he was sorrowing as he rubbed his fingers over a faint red-ochred painting which represents the serpent of Uluru. The painting was re-traced at each ritual, Kadakadeka explained, but today it is faint, for many years have gone by since the tribesmen gathered at this place.

Strange is it not, but the painting he now rubbed is the very essence of this Karungara ritual. Its chant represented the death of the great Mother of all the tribes and her re-birth—how she came into the land and by striking the earth with her sacred *wana*—the Yalmanindji of the northern tribes—waters gushed forth and the land became fruitful for the people of her cult.

From the place of the Mother, Kadakadeka and I went and stood before the ritual stone of Kapanya and, just out from it, on some sandy ground, he showed me the exact spot where the Earth Mother's *kornala* (ritual-trench) was dug to symbolize her womb from which the initiates came to be re-born into manhood.

'I been die "inside" that place,' he said, 'and when business over I was "outside" and alive once more.'

His voice faded away as an echo against the cliff wall above in which the sleeping elders rested in the *ngoru*, and then we trudged back to our camp beneath the mulga-trees.

That night I could see the 'shadow of a great rock in a weary land', and as the winds sighed amidst the leaves of our camp-trees I thought of Another who also passed 'from death to life'.

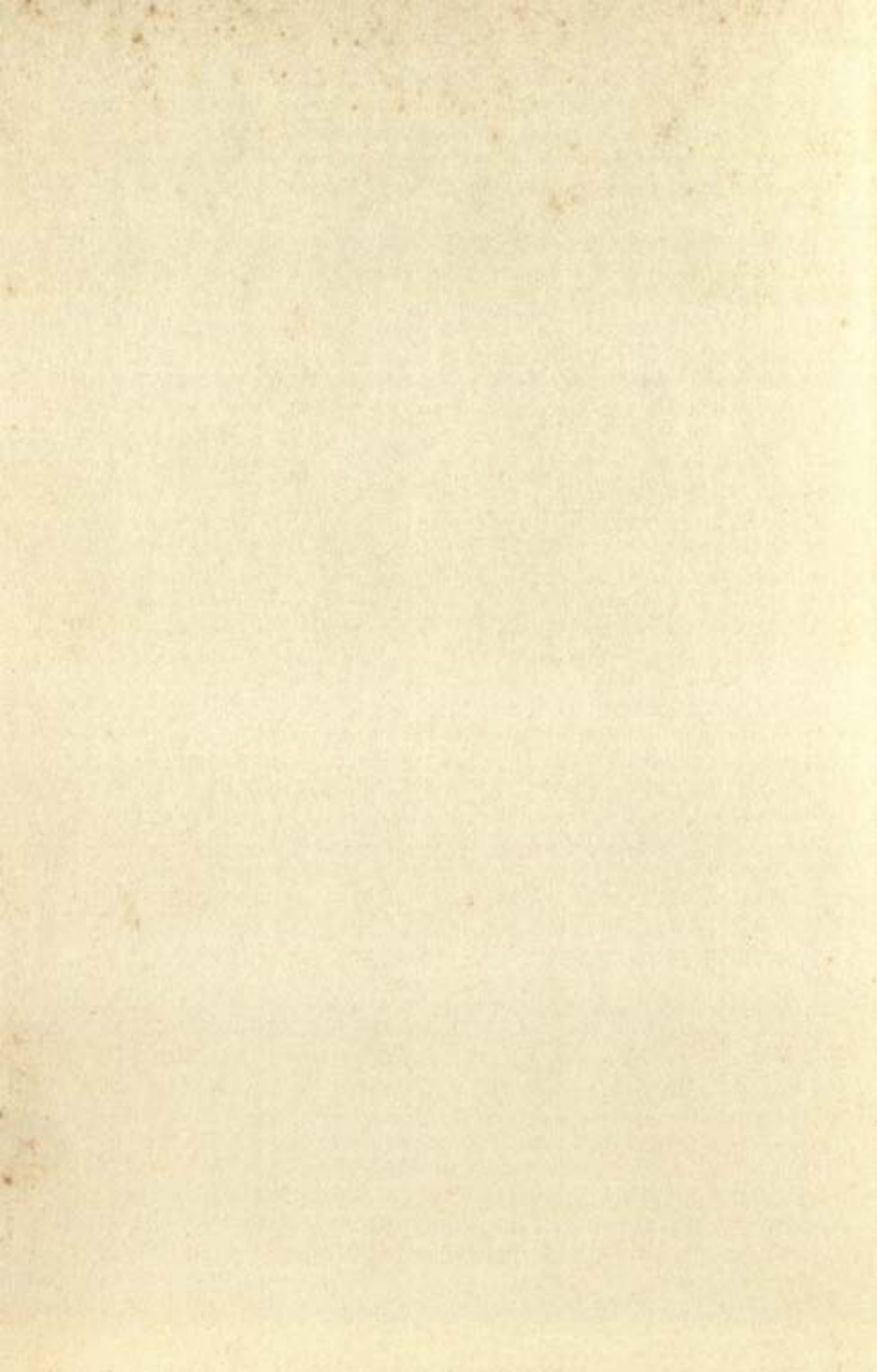
Kadakadeka chanted on and I noticed that he always looked towards the mountain. Perhaps he was thinking of his people who had lost their way of life in the towns and the missions.

'One time plenty blackfellow,' sadly from the old man, 'now nothing in this country . . . nothing only tree and this old rock.'

Around us are the camp-fires of the tourists who have come from afar to visit this place. The Mother-place is lonely as her people lead another way of life.

The church-bells ring . . . the Bible is read . . . the answer is for the future.





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